WITH THE BANKS AT HER MERCY.

An Australian Banking Story.

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WITH THE BANKS AT HER MERCY

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AN AUSTRALIAN BANKING STORY

By A. DONNISON

AUTHOR OF

"WINNING A WIFE IN AUSTRALIA"

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WITH THE BANKS AT HER MERCY.

PRECIS.

CHAPTER I.—Scene—Interior of one of the Banks in Sydney—showing the inner working. Period—The present day. Introduction of the two chief characters of the Book.

CHAPTER II.—Leads up to the meeting of the two characters, man and woman.

CHAPTER III.—Their first interview, and the opening of the plot.

CHAPTER IV.—A musical evening at Potts' Point, at which Miss Dalrymple appears as a veiled character, arousing the intense interest of Mr. Dallas, and foreshadowing mystery.

CHAPTER V.—Miss Dalrymple begins her financial operations. Concern of Dallas. Banking operations explained.

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CHAPTER VI.—Life in the Counting House.

CHAPTER VII.—Plot develops. Miss Dalrymple invites Dallas to dine with her.

CHAPTER VIII.—How the dinner passed off—a novel situation.

CHAPTER IX.—The scene after the dinner. The mystery profoundly affects Dallas.

CHAPTER X.—Further financial operations, in which the mystery grows deeper.

CHAPTER XI.—Financial complications. Dallas tries to force the position, but is outmatched by the woman's skill.

CHAPTER XII.—The key to the mystery.

CHAPTER XIII.—Complications increase.—Dallas has a final interview with Miss Dalrymple, but fails to master the situation. Receives his dismissal.

CHAPTER XIV.—Miss Dalrymple leaves Australia, while confederates carry on the financial operations, now approaching a climax.

CHAPTER XV.—First suspicion of the frauds.—Excitement in the Bank.

CHAPTER XVI.—The methods of the conspirators traced out.

CHAPTER XVII.—The victims compare notes.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Fresh set of complications result therefrom. Tragedy looming ahead.

CHAPTER XIX.—Dallas breaks down, and has to take holiday. Goes to Tasmania and Melbourne. No news of Miss Dalrymple. All the conspirators have escaped.

CHAPTER XX.—Dallas remains in the country. Letter reaches him from Miss Dalrymple calling him back to Sydney.

CHAPTER XXI.—Another interview with Miss Dalrymple, who describes events.

CHAPTER XXII.—Same interview. Miss Dalrymple relates the actions of the conspirators in Europe.

CHAPTER XXIII.—And how her woman's wit and skill once more controls the situation, and reveals how grand can be a woman's character.

The Author claims this is an "original" story, in the true sense of the word. It is quite different from ordinary stories in subject, conception, plot, character, and treatment.

It is terse and dramatic—limited to the doings of the two characters.

Dialogue preponderates, as it more dramatically maintains the action which hardly ceases.

CHAPTER I.

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.

"See thou character."

"Give thy thought no tongue
Nor any unproportioned thought his act."

—Hamlet.

The great doors of the Bank swung open with ponderous state. The Banking Chamber was full of stir. There was the hurrying of steps; the noise of many voices; the click and clatter of coin; the flutter of notes under the rapid fingers of the tellers.

A stir and movement everywhere. The coming and going of clerks; the whisk and whirr of deft turning over of pages. The rustling of cheques, the clatter of rulers, pens, the thud of books. Office-doors banged. But the precision of regular work was stamped upon the surging hum. A busy turmoil of urgent pressing business.

In the midst of the bustle around, Keith Dallas sat in his office, leisurely perusing the day's letters which the correspondence-clerk had deposited on the desk.

Dallas glanced through the pile, one by one, replacing them face downwards. He took up the last, scanned it, and laid it upon the others. The clerk would shortly return and take them away.

Dallas turned to other work. Presently he laid down his pen, and, leaning back in his chair, re-read the last letter.

Apparently it was an ordinary business communication, the writer requesting to be allowed to

open an account. The signature was "Grace Dalrymple." But the handwriting denoted character, and the short, concise wording appealed to the instincts of the business man.

"Accustomed to business, and—young," commented Dallas, as he examined the note.

He put it aside. The clerk returned.

"Any comments, sir?"

"No, Addison, you may take them. Stay; I am keeping this letter, and will answer it myself. Let me see the enclosure."

"I am afraid it has been passed through the exchanges; I handed the entry to the teller half-an-hour ago."

"A cheque?" queried Dallas.

"No, sir; a letter of credit by a London Bank on the Corporate Bank here."

"Was it quite in order with cheque attached?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ascertain if the Exchange clerk has gone out."

In two minutes Addison returned with the document in his hand.

The sub-accountant carefully examined the cheque and endorsement.

Without a word, Dallas returned it to Addison, and resumed his writing.

The letter of credit, innocently issued by a London house on the other side of the world, perfunctorily made out, entered and signed without a thought bestowed upon it more than is given to many hundreds of its fellows bearing the same date—came to Sydney, formed the beginning of a chain of circumstances that led on to crime, mystery, and the inevitable tragedy, which would assuredly have taken a different direction and affected other careers, had but Dallas passed that letter without second scrutiny.

Yet the document was correct in itself. It passed through the Exchanges, was compared with

the advice by the Bills Payable clerk in the Corporate Bank, was entered up in the books of the department, and next morning was stamped "Paid," tied up with the other vouchers paid on that day, placed in the voucher-chamber, and so far as this history is concerned, was never again inspected. Yet it had winged its shaft.

A few days later, Dallas paused beside the "D" Ledger.

"Show me the account of Grace Dalrymple."

With the promptness of an expert, the ledger-keeper caused the huge ledger to open itself at the required place.

The account already showed numerous transactions to have passed. The sub-accountant glanced at the heading of the account.

"Did you take this lady's signature?"

"No, sir, it came in a letter, written on an enclosed slip of paper."

"Then, you are not aware of her occupation, or if 'husband's authority' be advisable?"

"I am not, sir."

"Let me see the next few entries that reach you."

"Cheques in favour of numbers," remarked Dallas to himself, as he walked away.

Perhaps he was conscious of that vague sense of presentiment which so often comes to men who live under the influence of intense mental effort, and felt he ought to have exercised the banker's usual prudence, and ascertained somewhat more as to their new constituent. Had the apparent straightforwardness of a letter lulled to rest the native cautiousness of a Scotchman?

In the course of the day, the ledger-keeper presented two cheques to Dallas. He casually examined the face of the cheques, the marks, and stampings on the backs, and returned them to the clerk, as though they betrayed nothing of note.

As soon, however, as he had passed out from the office, Dallas made certain notes in his private diary. It was only a precautionary act, for in the midst of the claims of scores of ordinary business matters, it was not to be expected that his mind would retain remembrance of trifling incidents, while experience had taught him to take cognisance of any circumstance, however slight, which bore relation to transactions not finally closed.

When, throughout the day, distinct business matters need to be dealt with in turn, it is very necessary to keep the mind disentangled, as it were, and much of Dallas' success was due to his clearheadedness in being able to pass on to subordinates such details as did not call for his own immediate attention. He was thus never over-crowded in his work, but always on the alert for the unforeseen, and prepared to give thought and care to the weightier matters which ever wait upon the judgment of the chief officials.

In fact, Miss Dalrymple's account and its transactions had passed from his mind, when soon after three o'clock, the ledger-keeper, opening the door, appeared with a deposit slip in his hand.

"You said, sir, you would like to see the entries that were being passed through this new account."

Dallas took the slip, which represented a considerable amount. On the back were enumerated several cheques, forming part of the deposit.

"Obtain me all these cheques."

He resumed his writing as the clerk left the room in order to trace the whereabouts of the cheques before they should pass out of the Bank. A few minutes later he placed them beside the sub-accountant.

Dallas nonchalantly turned them over in his hand, and gave them back to the clerk. "That is all," he said; "the same to-morrow."

In the morning Dallas had detected the larger of Miss Dalrymple's cheques to have come through

the Merchants' Bank, and that, now, one of the cheques paid in by the lady was drawn by Morier and Cie—a firm unknown to him—on the same bank. He simply added a note to his diary, if need be, for future reference, and then steadily disposed of the work that had accumulated on his table.

An hour later, Dallas was walking down George-street, and had absolutely forgotten the incident in a crowd of other almost similar matters. He had merely observed the usual caution followed out with new constituents whose antecedents happen to be unknown. And yet, a half-consciousness of having forgotten something caused him several times to pause in his walk and endeavour to recollect what he may have overlooked.

It was the mystic touch of that undiscovered force in the world connecting mind and matter, and the events looming before him were conveying their messages to the receptive mind by telegraphic touch, which were faintly felt, but not understood.

Dallas had a wide acquaintance with Sydney folk, such as one is wont to meet in the city in the late afternoon. Officials, merchants, bankers, and men of standing were now leaving their offices and making their way homeward. A bow, a nod, or a smile of recognition greeted almost every second man he met, while more rarely he had the pleasure of the always marked bow of the few ladies it was his privilege to know.

Although a bachelor, Dallas was not a "society-man," as the term is understood, and refrained, as much as possible from accepting the too-lavish invitations which were ready to be showered upon one in his position who had already earned the acknowledgment of ability.

Among a few families he was intimately received, his sterling worth and quiet, unassuming manner winning appreciation. At these houses he was always glad to spend one or two evenings in every week (thus varying the monotony of the

lodging-house), for Dallas denied himself the luxury of a club.

But a man who thus feels himself to be steadily advancing his position in life, esteemed and sought after by his fellows, and conscious of possessing the judgment, the knowledge of men and things, and the capacity for work necessary to fit him for the highest posts, cannot be expected to have reached the higher plane without feeling that natural ambition which bids him prepare himself for the still more advanced office which comes in time to those few who sedulously strive, and know how to wait.

Nor is it to be supposed that Dallas's life had been uneventful. On the contrary, he had had a wide experience (which, however, cannot be referred to now), tending to develop to an unusual degree the manliness of character until, at the present time, we find him in the full strength and vigour of comparatively early manhood.

One has consummate confidence in oneself when all the natural powers are strong, and everything seems to be capable of accomplishment. It is the gift of perfect manhood, and yet, imperceptibly, an insignificant incident has been powerful enough to disturb the mental equipoise. Is it really contended than man can dissever himself from the influence of the spiritual world within and around him? Unconsciously Dallas was affected in mind, and stirred by a vague sense of unrest, now he shunned companionship and sought a quieter thoroughfare.

He passed up Hunter-street, turned along Macquarie-street, entered the Domain, and, with easier step, took the direction of the Fig-tree Avenue. Instinct felt for the briarwood in the one pocket, and for the pouch in another. He was saying to himself at the time how delightfully pleasant it was to stroll in the shade of the trees, and pause to watch the cricket-practice. Then the match struck, and the fragrant cloud, light as the summer air, drifted past on either side.

Past the gates of the Botanic Gardens, where the unpicturesque notice-board curtly states "No Smoking Allowed;" past the brow of the hill which reveals a glimpse of Woolloomooloo, with its houses on the far hillside piled up like those of Naples, and whence, too, one notes the vista of the long waters of the harbour stretching down beyond Bradley's Head to the far Gap, at the Heads; along the crest with Woolloomooloo Bay spread out below, and the tree-shrouded villas of the opposite shore checking the further view; on and onward to the point—Lady Macquarie's Chair—leisurely strolled Keith Dallas, enjoying the last serene smoke that the Fates had decreed should soothe the unburdened mind.

Ah, me! how often is it thus, that our Destiny comes to us with a kindly regret, granting us a tender last farewell of that which we most love, ere it be taken from us for ever.

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF EVENTS.

"His years are young, but his experience old,
His head unmellowed, but his judgment ripe,
And, in a word (for far behind his worth
Come all the praises that I now bestow),
He is complete in feature as in mind,
With all good grace to grace a gentleman."
—"Two Gentlemen of Verona."

In Australian Banks, the post of sub-accountant carries with it varying duties, and not infrequently its functions are adapted to the holder, for the time being, of the position, rather than the appointment being made of the officer to the work.

Some few years previously Dallas had been promoted from the accountantship of a country branch to his present office, and gradually a change had taken place in the routine of his official work.

In the country branches the supervision of the office is entrusted to the accountant, who being encouraged to make himself conversant with the inner particulars of the business, in due time qualifies himself for the post of manager. It is during this period that the man's qualifications betray themselves, and his future career depends upon the degree of knowledge of men and things that he proves himself to be capable of acquiring. Dallas's marked success led to his transference to the Sydney office of the Bank, where his Scotch qualities of shrewd insight into business and penetration of character becoming recognised both by the customers of the Bank and the managing authorities, he found himself more

and more coming into contact with the public. This naturally led to certain work, hitherto attended to by the sub-accountant being transferred to the heads of various departments, while Dallas undertook many of the duties appertaining to the offices of the manager and accountant. Of these duties, a part has already been referred to, in the dealing with such correspondence as he thought fit, and in his sanctioning the payment of certain bills and cheques upon his own responsibility.

With the public he had become popular by reason of a certain coolness of temperament and sauvity of manner, which constitute themselves invaluable adjuncts when one has interviews with all sorts and conditions of men, and, moreover, many of the letters and the notices of dishonour of cheques and bills being signed by Keith Dallas in clear handwriting, it naturally came about that his name became familiar with all the customers of the Bank .

Hence it happened on the following afternoon that a notice of dishonour of a cheque. with answer "effects not cleared," was submitted to Dallas for signature. The cheque had been paid in by Grace Dalrymple.

Beyond cautioning the ledger-keeper against paying Grace Dalrymple's cheques before ascertaining her deposits to be "cleared," Dallas took no further notice of the matter. He had observed that the unpaid cheque was drawn by Morier and Cie, and at once concluded his half-formed suspicions to be correct, and that this new customer was—like so many others—initiating a mushroom business "on credit," and, as usual, had to seek credit with new and weak firms.

"It is a mistake," repeated Dallas to himself, in his decided way, "to allow a customer to open an account without first being personally seen, and some knowledge gleaned as to means. We shall need now to keep incessant watch on another

troublesome account, for, I suppose, that first deposit of seventy-five pounds represented her entire capital. Pest!"

Dallas was banging his books and papers into his safe while this thought passed through his mind, and as he uttered the last word aloud, as a vent to his feelings, he viciously flung-to the heavy iron door with somewhat of a crash.

Having turned his key in the lock, he ascended to the dressing-room. Here was the usual hubbub consequent upon the presence of some half-score of men, whose play-hour had come, and who, while going through the various evolutions pertaining to the dressing-room, gave vent to those ebullitions of gay humour which to the outsider seem to invest the bank clerk's profession with an insouciance not discoverable in other paths of life.

Dallas's advent made no difference in the bandying of words, for men of his calibre do not find it necessary to "stand upon their dignity," and he was wont to take in good part the half-sly joke it was impossible to resist aiming at him.

"Has anyone heard yet that Dallas thinks of getting married?" asked one—Heselton by name—as the gentleman in question passed out of ear-shot.

"Dallas marry!" quoth another. "More likely to marry a bank, as a nun marries heaven."

"Ah, yes," chimed in a third; "I was just so, before I married—bad luck to it!"

"Everett is counting up his chickens," remarked another.

"There will be some fun soon, said one, who was none other than Ledger-keeper "D." "Dallas has taken an 'edge' against a new account; it seems a bit 'shady,' and as soon as it overdraws, then—dishonour for the cheque."

"Why not? Where does the joke come in?"

"Well, the account belongs to a lady, and my belief is, she has money."

"Ah! what is her name?"

"She will tackle Dallas for an explanation," persisted Ledger-keeper "D."

"Well, you can propose that he shall make the 'amende honorable' by marrying her, and relieve Heselton's anxiety."

"But, who is the lady?"

"Miss Grace Dalrymple," replied Ledger-keeper "D," his head emerging from the towel.

"Grace Dalrymple!" repeated Everett the receiving-teller. "I remember,—I took her deposit to-day. Fine woman, I remember—ah!"

"Hullo, Everett, what took place? Is she a handsome woman, eh?"

"Ah. I was busy at the time . . . but—she knows her business," he added, meditatively.

"Well, it will be warm for Dallas when he refuses to pay her cheque," opined Ledger-keeper "D," as he worked himself into his coat, and slammed his way out the door.

"Who is the lady, Everett?" whispered Heselton; "fine woman, eh? Has she money?"

"My friend, you may ask Dallas; you may be sure he knows all about her; but you had better hurry up, old man, for Dallas won't wait for you." And Everett departed.

There was already a generally deserted look in the erstwhile busy, bustling banking-chamber, despite the fact that many of the clerks were still working, while the messengers were engaged sweeping the floors, dusting the desks, filling inkstands, and putting all things in order for next day's business. The hours of vigorous brainful work were over, and light-heartedly every one was departing for his home, to live a different life for the next two-thirds of the twenty-four hours.

Dallas spent the evening at Her Majesty's Theatre. Instinctively he sought relief in the stirring sensation of London drama. A Scotch youth who had grown up on the heaths of the North, strong in limb and constitution, keen as to sport, un-

impassioned, cool-headed, comes to London like a typical hero to make his fortune. He meets the inevitable adventuress, handsome, brilliant, dashing—and unscrupulous. The usual strife between head and heart, the one backed by an empty purse, the other swelling with new life feels able to win the whole world. They marry on anticipations, for the head yields to the the omnipotent heart. A rude awakening to the prosaic necessities of life. Then, to get money. What are youth, beauty, and charms to a woman without money, without position? She feels life is passing without its triumphs. Should the man gratify the wife's ambition? Wait! "Cui bono?" Of what use is money, when the long years of waiting have taken sweetness from life? Now, now; it is wanted now. The pleasures of middle age, forsooth! Are all these gifts and graces given only to be wasted? Distracted love with the longing to please; the fierce endeavour to work and win spending itself in vain. The vanity of human effort! Then, the post of trust; the wish, the half-suggestion, the strong character sapped by indecision ———

Dallas could await no more. Moved by a sudden impulse, he left his seat, made his way to the door, passed down the quiet stairs into the full light of the spacious entrance lobby.

In Pitt-street, the usual saunterers were passing up and down. He turned into Market-street, walking quickly. He paused at Elizabeth-street to allow two trams to pass—the incoming one empty, the outgoing nearly so. He crossed into Hyde Park, and struck off from the path across the grass. He stopped, half-turned, and bared his head to the night air.

"I could not stand that sort of thing," he said. The drama having been brilliantly staged, the contrasts of wealth and poverty depicted realism, focussed to the mental grasp, in a vivid object lesson.

It indicated the power with which temptation could invest itself.

Dallas could not shut out the picture, it clung about him. His earnest nature did not permit a thought, a scene, an impression to be lightly put aside. Ideas came to stay with him.

He strode through the grass, across the central avenue to the open sward beyond. There, on the crest of the ridge, he looked down upon the myriads of lights which seem to tell of the vast hive of beings who pack the densely-housed hollows of Woolloomooloo.

It was a striking scene, not without majesty, as he looked from the grand pile of the Museum, which towered its classic facade upon his right, across the valley to where the heights of Darlinghurst reared up their many lighted windows, house upon house, mansion above mansion. The great Cathedral of St. Mary's stood up upon the left hand. A noble scene, exercising potent influence upon the mind, acted as a counterpoise to the other scene of human passion, with its strength and its weakness.

His equanimity returned. Unconsciously his hand sought out the companionable pipe, and before ten minutes had passed he resumed his walk, leisurely strolling down William-street, glancing with even mind into the shop windows, which, one by one, were being closed for the night. He ascended the steep incline, passed along Darlinghurst-road, and turning into Macleay-street, arrived at the door of his lodgings.

Has one ever felt that sense of uneasiness which clings to the mind, faint, vague, yet perceptible?

In the morning, Dallas wondered at having slept later than usual. He breakfasted hurriedly, and then walked down to the Bank.

The routine of the day's work began and proceeded as usual. Ten o'clock struck; the doors opened. He had passed the bills and cheques of the first exchange which the ledger-keepers had referred to

him, and having finished his customary perusal of the correspondence, was in the act of taking his papers out of the basket-tray, when the messenger appeared at the open door.

"You will find Mr. Dallas within, ma'am," he said, and he stood aside to allow a lady to enter.

CHAPTER III.

LEADING ONWARDS TO APPRECIATION.

"In life there are meetings which seem like fate."
—Owen Meredith.

"Mr. Dallas, I presume," the lady said, glancing as she spoke at a half-opened paper she held in her hand.

The grace of manner delighted the sub-accountant, who, rising to receive his visitor, moved round the table to place a chair for her nearer the side of the desk.

The lady, an utter stranger to him, was tall, remarkably well-dressed, and distinguished looking. She appeared an embodiment of one of those touches of romance that now and again come to vary the hard, matter-of-fact routine of city business.

"Some wealthy constituent who wishes for advice as to investing surplus money," conjectured Dallas, as he slowly resumed his seat.

"I regret to have received this communication this morning," she began without hesitation, and at the same time handing Dallas the paper she held in her hand.

A glance showed him it was a notice of dishonour. Instantly his eyes sought the name of the addressee.

"Miss Grace Dalrymple." He betrayed surprise, which did not escape notice.

"Are you aware of any peculiarity in the circumstances, if I may be allowed to ask?" she questioned somewhat quickly.

But Dallas had recovered his composure.

"It depends entirely upon the nature of the transaction. If it be private, yes; but if a business matter, well, perhaps, no."

"It is both."

"Then, it would hardly be safe to hazard an opinion."

"But it is most important to me. As soon as I received this notice from you I hurried to Messrs. Morier et Compagnie, and they were most indignant that their bankers should have felt themselves called upon to express doubt. They tell me they have asked for no accommodation."

"Possibly they are quite a new firm?"

"Yes, but well accredited, I understand."

"It is important to you," said Dallas, after a pause, "because you accept many cheques from them, and you naturally think this Bank will, perhaps, not care to honour your cheques until those drawn by 'Morier and Cie.,' and passed into your credit, have been paid."

Precisely so, but still more, it is doubtful if I should continue to entertain transactions with them."

"Then I ought to cause full enquiries to be made as to their position and antecedents."

A shade of sudden alarm seemed to pass over the expression of her face. Dallas's eyes were resting upon her partly in study, partly in conjecture as to the nature of her business, and secretly in admiration as to her handsome countenance, full of character and intelligence. The passing shadow upon her face startled him. There was something concealed. But her manner was quite unchanged; she was not one to give evidence of thought or feeling beyond whatever her words and movements might choose to indicate. She spoke, too, with a courtliness reminiscent of another sphere of life, and oddly contrasting with the subject matter of their present conversation.

"I would prefer you not to do so, at all events,

for the present. You do not, of course, understand my position. As a matter-of-fact, being known only to this firm, and the principals in London, I am in a measure dependent upon their good offices for the furtherance of my own business. Should they ascertain that I have been instituting inquiries, they would probably intimate a connection to be no longer desirable."

Dallas bowed.

"Perhaps," she continued, "you might deem it proper for me to disclose my especial business, on account of being one of your constituents, and if you desire it, I will do so, but, at the same time, I frankly confess my reluctance to broach the subject."

"It is the usual course, Madam, but in this instance, there appears to be no reason for me to urge any such step."

"Thank you," she replied, "but I wish to keep my own counsel, simply because a necessary condition consists in my being able to frequent the society of fashion, and this privilege would be lost, were it to become known that I had any connection with a millinery firm. I am speaking thus confidentially with you, but I had hoped to have been able to have conducted my banking affairs without attracting the Bank's attention, but, of course, this unpaid cheque rendered it necessary for me to see you, in order to ascertain the exact footing upon which in future the account will stand in your eyes."

"I thank you for your confidence, which, of course, will not in any way be taken advantage of. As to the account, I will myself take care that it be duly protected, and if any adverse circumstance should arise, I will venture to communicate with you immediately. If I recollect aright, your address is the Carlton Hotel, Wemyss Street."

"I am more obliged than I can tell you. It is precisely the favour I should have wished to ask of you."

Saying these words, Miss Dalrymple rose from her chair.

"As she lingered a moment, there appeared to be a gracefulness—a willowy-ness—of motion. The freedom from constraint in her attitude imparted a sense of confidence both in herself, and in Dallas. To him, her deportment idealized the elegance one cannot disassociate from "form." He was impressed; possibly the difference as to other visitors who usually interviewed him, commended itself to his best instincts.

He held open the door, and she passed out with a pleasant glance and a smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Dallas."

Then he sat down again, and resumed his work —as soon as he succeeded in recollecting that this mundane duty called arbitrarily for fulfilment.

What momentous influences may shape themselves in a few minutes!

Nor could Dallas conceal from himself the consciousness that not one of the many thousand people whom he had met, had ever affected him in like degree. His visitor had presented all the traits of an ideal personage. Her candour and treatment of him, at once as her superior in business, and yet as a gentleman, her equal, flattered his inmost nature, while her unmistakable aptitude for business-dealing compelled his admiration. But it was upon her distinguished beauty and charm of manner that, after all, the thoughts of the man loved to dwell. Accustomed as he had been for years to see new people every day, with absolute unconcern, now, the experience of the last ten minutes came to him as a revelation. He had never conceived it to be possible for a fellow-being to be so possessed of attractiveness due to charming personality. Perhaps, it was only affinity, but the foundation was laid upon which love builds his phantasy.

It needed positive effort for Dallas to withdraw

his thoughts and concentrate them upon the dry, prosaic matters in hand.

Possibly it is immersion in such subjects which tends to create appreciation of the romantic.

Still, several times during the day, he was wont to see a lady's face appearing between him and the paper as he wrote, and it is not unlikely certain incoherencies of expression betrayed themselves in his diction, and would have occasioned astonishment, had anyone familiar with Dallas's terse, lucid style chanced to peruse the communication.

But visions, be they never so bright, seem to lose their vividness in the midst of the unbending routine of daily business.

The days passed.

As the doctrines of Love and Matrimony were among Dallas's negligences and ignorances, it can be understood that a short business interview of ten minutes was quite insufficient for the ingrafting of the seed. If it chanced to have grown during the immediately succeeding hours, it was certainly choked with the cares of the next day.

And thus his mind returned to its normal state of level-headedness.

Dallas usually left his office about five o'clock in the afternoon, and was accustomed to saunter for an hour through the parks, or to cross the water in one of the quick-running ferry steamers, before betaking himself to his lodgings for dinner. Some six or eight gentlemen of fair standing in the city afforded congenial companionship, and after the dinner hour, he not infrequently preferred to spend part of the evening in the smoking-room. Occasionally he visited for an hour the house of a friend; but oftener, having conversed so much during the day, to become ensconced in a comfortable chair for an evening's reading, appeared in the light of a recreation.

But one afternoon he turned down George

Street, and, walking leisurely, entered at length the music shop of Hallam and Co.

The previous evening, the niece of a very old friend having referred to a certain piece of music—just out—which a letter from a girl friend in England had characterized as "ravishing," led Dallas to seek to gratify her wish.

Several people were either sitting or standing at the counter, turning over the sheets of music.

Proceeding to fill up the widest gap that appeared, Dallas asked the attendant for the "Polish Dance," by Schawanka.

"We both appear to be buying the same piece, I have the music here."

Dallas almost started. Beside him was Miss Dalrymple.

"I am pleased to hear of such confirmation of my choice."

"I am tempted, however, on my part, to question whether you are selecting music for yourself."

Dallas half smiled at the trait of feminine perception.

"I suppose there must be a species of freemasonry among musicians," he hazarded.

"You are quite right," she returned, "we always know who are given to the gentle art, and—we can also determine the professional from the amateur."

Dallas saw that she divined his mild effort at probing her secret, and that she deftly turned aside the shaft.

Taking their music rolls, they left Hallam's, chatting about all manner of things.

"Whenever the Mail brings in new music of a sensational or startling character, it is always put aside for me," she explained laughingly. "In fact, it is to be feared my music account surpasses the traditional milliner's bill."

"Then yours is an example of extraordinary devotion."

"Ah, yes, it has need to be so. I practice during two hours daily."

"And people live in the same house?" he queried.

"Yes, all around me; but, then, I am considerate enough to choose a time when others may be least disturbed."

"And is the practice devoted to learning these new, sensational and startling masterpieces?"

The tinge of raillery in the words was far from displeasing to her. It suggested a sense of humour one would hardly have looked for in Dallas.

"Well, you know, music is the golden key which opens the drawing-rooms of society. As you already understand, it is, therefore, necessary for the promotion of my interests. And it is also equally necessary that the selections should be novel. To hear one of my pieces rendered by another, is the signal for me to revisit Hallam's."

"Then, you do not count the two hours of work a labour of love?"

"Yes, of course, one loves everything one has to care for."

Dallas laughed easily. Vivacity in another is pleasant after a crowded day's work.

"I confess," he said, "I feel a desire to hear you play. I hope such pleasure will soon be mine."

"Undoubtedly," she remarked complacently. "although there is doubt as to your appreciating my style. You are not musical."

"I had not admitted so much of the truth," quoth Dallas.

"No, but you forget the freemasonry of musicians."

"True. Hence I must trust to a sympathetic bond, equally effectual, being discovered in some other respect."

"Quite so, but might you not already claim knowledge of the existence of such bond?"

"It is mine, rather, to admit that you are more skilled than myself to detect resemblances."

"Some advantages must be allotted to woman."

From the moment of the first interview Dallas had become interested. It was also evident that there was no intention to allow this interest to disappear. In every circumstance, she commanded attention; for this woman of the world possessed the fascination of intellect. A studied conversationalist, she yet appeared to draw her inspiration from the minds of others, divining with sympathetic insight the originality of their thought, and in inviting into prominence the peculiarity and beauty of each character, rendered their personality delightful. Even Dallas's close nature seemed ready to open itself, and as they talked, there came something of a gladdening sensation; the groove of every-day thought being left behind, the dormant life and energy of a forceful intelligence awakened into a delight of its own, in response to the power of attraction possessed by her own cultured individuality.

One develops under a sense of appreciation. The refinement of a manly nature found the opportunity for its expression, as the conversation, touching upon one subject after another, left the interest in each still unexhausted.

The time passed quickly, although they walked but very slowly. They had continued along George Street as far as Bridge Street, whence they ascended past the Exchange, and past the majestic piles of architecture devoted to the different Departments of the Public Service, which form a fitting adornment of a city, and worthy of the future yet to be.

A street still full of historic trees and stones and memories of those far-off "early days" upon which, even from the present vantage point of time, it seems so strange to look back.

With such subjects as the scene would call up it is conceivable that Dallas was given an opportunity, which in his, then, frame of mind, needed

nothing more to render his companionship as attractive as her own had become to him.

To Miss Dalrymple this was all new knowledge, and that which makes dry reading in the pages of history, takes to itself a different grace, when studied in connection with a narrator gifted with the power to please.

Then they crossed Macquarie Street, pausing again to admire the facade of the Government offices, and, entering the side gate of the Botanic Gardens, they ascended the slight incline—the superb situation of which had formerly led to its having been chosen for the location of the Exhibition Building of 1879.

"What a sad loss!" Miss Dalrymple exclaimed, alluding to its destruction by fire.

"Yes, but it gave us back our view," assented Dallas laconically, as he complacently regarded the fair scene of woodland, garden, shore and water.

Miss Dalrymple laughed lightly.

"Do you know," she said, turning towards him, "you are one of the most fortunate peoples on the face of the earth, and you know also how to appreciate your good fortune, I ought to add. Nowhere are there such lovely parks and gardens as in Australian cities. I admire them more than any other feature. The care they have received makes the omission of tree-planting in the streets seem all the stranger oversight. The elm-trees of Melbourne, and the oaks of Sydney, are like old friends to me. I am fond of trees. Had I not elected to be a—musician, let us say—I think I should have studied woodcraft."

"Why not both? One always follows two professions."

"Two professions! Why do you say 'two professions?'" and she made the quick movement of the head which he had already noticed.

"I mean the profession which forms the serious study of our life, and the other, our recreation, to

check the rigidity which would otherwise overtake our natures, were we to sell ourselves absolutely to one aim and endeavour in life."

"Ah!"

"It was now Dallas who turned quickly to his companion. There was a world of meaning in the exclamation.

She was looking down upon the fleet of war vessels lying cosily at anchor in Farm Cove. Her parasol, thrown backwards to ward off the setting sun, rested upon her shoulder; she slowly twirled it, the somewhat strong but shapely fingers delicately caressing the handle.

But she appeared unconscious of his enquiring glance.

"I suppose," resumed Dallas, half-lazily, "ladies do not trouble to elevate money-or-position-earning attributes to the rank of professions?"

A swift momentary glance escaped her.

Dallas noticed it.

Of what was she thinking? Did she imagine Dallas's words to be directed against herself?

"They do!" she said suddenly. "Women have ambitions as well as men, aye, every whit as keen. Is it to be thought, for a moment, that as young girls we enter upon the hard, serious training of many years, to seek to perfect ourselves, without having before us an object kept steadily in view? It is always possible for educated women to marry—such as any day they may choose. But do you suppose they never look beyond, never count up the cost, never consider what loss it means to surrender all their many years of training and self culture, by means of which they had reckoned upon earning a name for themselves in the world's annals? But if burdened with household duties, what hope remains to the accomplished woman of winning fame? Ah! the great mass of people do not yet comprehend how an increasingly large number of women are developing 'ambition,' as you term it, and more

and more, every decade, will their influence be felt in public affairs, and that influence, moreover, will be on the good side of things."

"I am quite ready to admit the superiority of women," prosaically replied Dallas, "and, speaking from personal experience, they have often wonderful heads for business, at all events, for seeing where their interests are concerned, but I think such has been characteristic throughout all ages."

Miss Dalrymple laughed as she looked towards Dallas, her eyelids half drooping. She liked this man. He was stolid, so matter-of-fact, innocent of sentiment, but alert in business, just like a man—"a woman's man"—and his speech tempered with a dry "half-humour"—if such term can be permitted—that one never knew when an odd saying would betray itself. He formed a new study for her.

When women have reached the maturity of youth they need deeper pleasures than those which were wont to delight them in their teens. There comes a craving to satisfy their intellect, to revel in the wit of words, to note the fruits of experience in the opinions of added years, to perceive evidences of ripened judgment, and weighed knowledge. The enjoyment of the beauty of form and colour yields place to the supremacy of mental powers and endowments. Girlish love is succeeded, perhaps, by the strong passion of the woman. Feeling, emotion, the very sense of enjoyment, all become deepened and intensified. The study of character, then, lends a charm to conversation that did not exist in earlier years, before had grown the power to estimate true value. A woman's love has to be won—against her will, as it were—not attracted like the quick fancy of the girl.

Grace Dalrymple understood Dallas, and appreciated him as a true and honourable gentleman. But she also recognised that he quite failed to comprehend anything of her character. How is it possible to understand the clever woman who handles

herself with ease, in the manoeuvres of conversational intercourse? And the zest that is hers when she feels she leads on the contest from the vantage ground of deeper insight?

"Men have not yet grown enthusiastic over the larger life of women," she returned, as they continued their steps towards the upper entrance, "and, perhaps, it is well. Were we to seek too early the responsibilities of public life, the strain might be over severe. But as each year sees a further advance steadily made, there can be but one result in time. That result—the absolute equality of both sexes in the possession of social and political rights, may not be in our generation, but it will be. Now, our paths diverge here. I am due at the Domain Terrace, and I will leave you to cogitate as to its being the wisest course to accept the inevitable with a good grace, and become voluntarily a champion of women's rights. They will come, you know.—Good-bye."

A bow, given with the ease of an accomplished lady, and the pleasant smile of a charming woman.

Dallas lifted his hat. He did not attempt to analyse his thoughts as he watched the graceful movement of her form, leisurely retreating along the path leading to the Terrace.

Dallas had not moved five yards from the spot where they separated, when he observed her unfasten the gate of one of the houses and pass within.

But she gave no glance in his direction.

With one's usual instinct in such circumstances, Dallas's hand sought for the pipe and pouch. Thoughtfully did he appear to fill the bowl as he slowly passed down the Avenue. As he blew the first cloud of smoke he took his pipe out of his mouth, looked at it, as though admiring its shape, and then replaced it.

He made no comment to himself, but appeared to interest himself in outside things. He noticed the child tumbling backward over a perambulator—

the rush of the nurse to pick it up. The dashing dogcart and tandem that passed on the outer drive, The two man-of-war sailors bestriding two livery hacks tearing down the road. The pair of sweethearts drifting along the opposite path.

But when he passed them all, he had recollection of none of them.

Of what was his mind thinking?

Twenty minutes elapsed before he reached home. Twenty minutes spent in the busy thronged thoroughfares of Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst. He remembered nothing of it.

The dinner hour came with its interval of unceasing talk, and restored him to his sense of outer things. But, later on, as he seated himself in an armchair in the smoking-room, facing the open window, so that the light from the chandelier might fall upon the pages of the book he held open in his hands, his thoughts once more began to stray. He read the words without comprehending their meaning, until, finding he had lost the thread, he commenced to read again. An unsolved idea was present with him, becoming vague and more vague, until an undefinable feeling troubled his brain. A sensation that eluded being grasped had settled itself there.

But sleep has a wonderful fashion of banishing phantasmal wanderings to their proper realms. It is difficult to wake up in the bright, fresh mornings, and find oneself to be still haunted by those ill-shaped conceptions which are apt to win undue prominence in the over-tired imagination.

CHAPTER IV.

A MUSICAL EVENING.

"Music washes away from the soul the dust of every-day life." —Auerbach.

Nature intended Dallas for the niche in life which he filled. Without being an enthusiast, he was withal steadily devoted to his profession, and fortune has but one reward to give to faithful devotees. Without any apparent aiming at promotion, yet he seemed to be always the man at hand who was wanted.

Success in one respect seems in people's estimation to present an unanswerable argument for corresponding gifts of attainment in every other endeavour. Naturally the resultant circle of friends were ever at pains to exploit those qualities, which needed but opportunity to develop indefinite expansion.

It is perhaps as difficult for some men to preserve seclusion, as for others to emerge therefrom, and when, in addition to other qualifications, one is found to be still a bachelor, and on the high-road to become—in people's estimation—nothing less than General Manager of the Bank, it can be understood that hostesses become numerous. An irreproachable private life, and certain sociable good qualities seem to promise in advance just that kind of brilliant "open house" which presents to the feminine mind the high ideal of married life to be attained by every mother's daughter. Women love to read about a state of being they never arrive at, but believe, nevertheless, it is in store for their daughters.

There is no doubt whatever but that this state of being exists. That it is never found is simply the individual's misfortune. But young girls may not see with the experienced eyes of matrons, who have long since graduated in the sweet failing of giving rein to fancy, and reaping the worldly troubles consequent upon making an unworldly marriage.

Is it, therefore, to be wondered at, that, wisdom-taught, the mother should seek to save the daughters from the error that marked her own heedlessness, and strive to fan the gentle flame of love only in the presence of an eligible "parti?"

But mothers and daughters will insist upon viewing the eligible "parti" with different eyes. Like still loves to mate with like.

The inability to "talk nonsense" placed Dallas at a disadvantage compared with even his youngest clerk, and possibly had militated against his matrimonial prospects. He lacked the "taking bonhomie" and gaiety of spirit which commends the suitor to the lady's favour.

It needs material perspicuity to connect the sober-visaged man with the brilliant entertainment of the fashion-thronged mansion.

And surely Dallas never pictured it. But then he was not yet married.

It is not to be supposed, that Dallas never admitted to himself the soft impeachment that he felt flattered at some casual instance of feminine regard. The pity of it is, it went no further. Already has been noticed the incident of his gratifying a young lady's wish in the matter—so very commonly followed—of his music-offering. The detailed narration of its reception has been omitted, but that may pass.

The young lady was an inmate—not the daughter—of the house at which Dallas most often visited. Mr. Justice Jerome, while still a struggling barrister, had married, taking for his wife the early friend

of Dallas's mother. Doubtless, old friendship would have caused Mrs. Justice Jerome to have been delighted had one of her own daughters chosen to perpetuate the alliance. But they had all married in marvellous succession. To fill the void, and possibly to maintain the reputation of her house for its attractiveness, Mrs. Jerome interested herself in her nieces, for one of whom, Miss Julia D'Arcy, Dallas had committed himself to the act of buying music. This trifling event was shortly afterwards succeeded by the despatch abroad of a series of daintily-written cards conveying intimation of a "musical evening" about to be given in honour of Miss D'Arcy's coming of age—a form of entertainment more difficult of successful accomplishment than the ordinary dance, which is able to conduct itself. But the "At Home" found favour with Mrs. Jerome. She excelled in the tactical skill needed to concentrate the proper constituent units, and was able to marshal the array of talent with a generalship that led each performer to believe that excellence had been attained.

But it needed unflagging zeal.

The house was remarkably well adapted to the purpose, while the adjuncts attested the capabilities of an half-acre allotment.

Entering from a certain street which gives access to so many houses of the wealthy, one found a somewhat small garden of the usual correct order. It was just sufficient in space to enable the residence to be properly removed from the entrance. One admired the solid, two-storey stuccoed house, the right side taken up with a large, square "bow-window," the left, with a wide colonnade which swept round the side and along the second front overlooking the harbour, forming a most estimable promenade, lit up at night with Wenham lights. The entrance-hall traversing the building, connected the colonnade, and encircled the double drawing-rooms, whose windows on every side opened out upon the promenade.

Surely, the daughters of the household were consulted when the architect framed his design. The right-hand portion of the ground floor contained the Judge's library, the ladies' sitting-room, and the large dining-room, along the water-view front of which the colonnade extended. A side passage running at right angles with the entrance-hall, led to the staircase, and also to that mysterious recessed part of the household whence originates the motive power that is indispensable to its well-being.

From the colonnade on the harbour-front one looked down upon the inevitable garden. Immediately in the foreground was, as a matter of course, the tennis-lawn, with a vine-trellis at either end to minimise the work of exploration after lost balls. Behind the trellises was sufficient space for the growth of trees, while here and there, odd corners lent themselves to the gaiety of the flowers of each season.

On the farther side of the lawn, an embankment curved itself outwards, adding a largeness of form which deceived the eye. Behind the embankment rose up two or three specimens of the palm, their outlines relieved against the waters of the harbour, and giving the outlook quite a semi-tropical character. To wander in their direction invited surprise by discovering the boundary of the estate. Some distance below, the water's edge might be discerned through the foliage. But these palms and the embankment formed the feature of the scene. The latter was a happy thought, upon which the intuitive instincts of every gardening genius loved to expend itself. Its position and massive proportions gave it the prominence which rendered conspicuous every "specimen," and it need hardly be said, the effect was striking. In no month is an Australian garden bare of flowers, and it can, therefore, be imagined what presentment was offered when a blaze of bloom swept round against the stems of the palms. A "coup d'oeuil" suggested the charac-

teristic of each quarter of the globe, but it was all Australian.

"Kurring-gai," presided over by a popular hostess, possessed attraction both in the afternoon and evening, which possibly contributed to the daughters' early settlement in marriage. And it might be supposed that Mrs. Jerome was not prepared to see her house lose any of its prestige. It has been shown that even Dallas was more susceptible as to the charms of this house than of any other. Certainly he was an appreciative friend of the Judge's, but even this distinction does not always account for one's predilections.

The evening was somewhat advanced, when Dallas, who had been detained, passed through the gates which bore upon a light scroll the letters "Kurring-gai." The house was brilliantly lit up. The hum of voices told of a large presence. There was unceasing movement. Figures constantly appeared and disappeared. Light coloured dresses flashed in the gaslight.

Dallas paused in full view of the scene, for all the windows and door were open, people promiscuously were thronging the drawing-rooms, and the almost equally well lighted colonnade. Seats were occupied, and couples passed up and down, the figures being distinctly seen, for there was no balustrading at the front or side (where one could step from the pavement to the grass), but only upon the harbour-front. Within the drawing-rooms, guests were standing in groups, conversing together, while sofas, settees, and lounges—all had their occupants, each one engaged in the animated conversation inseparable from the concourse of people. Here and there, Dallas was able to momentarily recognise an acquaintance. Suddenly the first notes of a duet hushed the crowd into silence, the promenading ceased, many passed within, crowding the salons like a concert-room, others took up vantage points near doorways.

"Ah!" quoth Dallas. "Mrs. Jerome understands the scientific requirements of a successful 'At Home.' She has drawn together brilliant talent as usual."

He listened awhile, for the singing rang clearly out into the night air. The duet was quite new to his unaccustomed ear.

"Not half-bad," he considered, as a dashing finale drew forth the approval of the audience.

The crowds instantly began to circulate once more, passing in and out in the apparently aimless manner observable of ants. A larger group had gathered at the farther end of the room. Doubtless their "intimates" were offering the customary true and false congratulations to the recent performers. The remarks, however, all fell into line, the genuine criticism being reserved.

In the meantime, Dallas had taken his way to the dressing room upstairs. Even upon the staircase were people passing up and down. In a few minutes he returned, and entering the drawing-room, found another performance in progress. To his ears, it was some unheard-of piece being tremendously dashed off in the conventional manner. Everyone was absorbingly listening, so he also remained in statue-like position. Having passed through a variety of phases, the pianiste clipped a series of staccato notes, and then grandly finished off with every note in the piano humming after the final bang.

There ensued applause, somewhat vociferous, followed by the usual undertone of admiration, congratulation and agitation, in the midst of which Miss D'Arcy, passing from one to another, at length encountered Dallas, who was maintaining a persistent search among the crowd for Mrs. Jerome.

"Oh, Mr. Dallas! I have not seen you all the evening until now."

"To admit the truth, I have but just arrived, and am endeavouring to discover your aunt."

"Oh, she is somewhere. How did you like my piece?"

"I have a double congratulation to offer you," said Dallas.

"I suppose on account of my having reached woman's estate, as uncle calls it, although I do not yet see the 'estate.'"

"Oh, that is a mere trifle; it will come in time. But you played wonderfully. What is the name of the piece?"

"The name! she exclaimed, and her eyes opened wide. "Why, the Polish Dance you sent me last week. I thought you had specially selected it for me, because of its suiting my style of playing."

"So I did."

"And all the time you knew nothing about it?"

"Yes, I knew all about it, except the sound."

Miss D'Arey's eyes opened still wider in astonished surprise.

"I will tell you the secret another time," explained Dallas, who, catching sight of Mrs. Jerome in the distance, hastened to move forward before she again became lost to view.

The hostess was conversing, slightly apart, with another lady whose rich dark hair, set off with a deep red rose, casually attracted his notice as he approached.

"Ah, Keith!" she exclaimed, "were it not that you are so privileged a friend, I should be angry at your late appearance."

"I have been long seeking my way to you to explain the ——"

Dallas suddenly stopped.

At the sound of his voice, the lady whom he had passingly observed, turned round from amid the group of people among whom she had moved, and flashed upon him in her beauty.

Misinterpreting Dallas's start of surprise, Mrs. Jerome smiled, and said,

"I shall be pleased to present you to Miss Dalrymple."

"But I have already the pleasure of knowing Mr. Dallas," exclaimed that lady.

"Well, really! I thought Keith went out so seldom ——" interjected Mrs. Jerome.

Then Dallas felt more interested in that "musical evening."

He presumed Miss Dalrymple intended to give them some music.

"No," said Miss Dalrymple, laughingly; "I have already completed my performance. Your coming late has deprived you of the pleasure that might otherwise have been yours. Mrs. Jerome must condole with you now, instead of serving out punishment."

"I am glad to find Keith has allied himself on my side. I must tell you, I was asking Miss Dalrymple to play once more, when you joined us most opportunely, so that now you can add your request to mine."

"It becomes a pleasant punishment," responded Keith, "but not more than I deserve. In point of fact, I can claim acquiescence as the fulfilment of a promise."

Miss Dalrymple's glance and his own for a moment met.

Dallas, on his part, divined nothing, whatever the lady may intuitively have discerned, but a smile passed lightly over her face.

"I fear me," she said, "there will be some ready to denounce as 'bad form' the monopolising twice of the piano, for there are still very many who have come prepared with music."

"Believe me," answered Mrs. Jerome, "they are only too delighted. Mr. Stentor is about to sing now; will you give us your selection afterwards?"

"You must also excuse me," said Miss Dalrmyple to Dallas, as Mrs. Jerome moved away, "but I must seek in my music-case for something to play.

Perhaps,'' she continued archly, ''I will so far remember my promise as to permit myself to choose one that will be likely to please you.''

Mr. Stentor sang.

Dallas proceeded from one group to another, meeting here and there people he knew, and wondering whence came all the rest.

The song was finished. Dallas told the singer he was glad that he had sung, and then looked for the re-appearance of Miss Dalrymple.

Presently the hubbub of peoples' voices seemed to still itself, and as Dallas, noticing the silence, looked round enquiringly, the first notes of the piano sounded.

It was hardly necessary for Dallas to move to a position whence he could see the instrument; even his ear told him Miss Dalrymple presided there. The full-toned ''semi-grand'' responded instantly, as everything animate and inanimate leaps with the alacrity of bounding life at the spirit-touch of the master hand. Dallas stood still as enthralled as if he were not Scotch. There was no movement in all the crowd; every one faced the same way. Unconscious of the attention, the pianiste, her full handsome countenance responsive to her theme, yielded herself to the delight of rendering into the melody the mental imagery of another's mind. To her it was absorbingly attractive. Catching the inspiration, conscious of her mastery of the instrument, and feeling every chord to be in unison with her own will, piano, theme, and player constituted one harmonious whole. There was no break, no pause. It was unknown music to Dallas. Inexplicable ideas seemed to race through his mind bearing him off to another sphere; full of delight, he strove to follow and catch the thoughts that evaded him.

Then it ceased.

As her hands fell from the notes, Miss Dalrymple glanced upwards, her eyes still aglow with the excitement of music.

The glance shot straight to Dallas. He resisted almost an impulse to rush forward. Then the crowd surging between, broke the spell, and with something of a sigh of relief, he passed out into the cool colonnade.

The genius of the woman struck and oppressed him. Perhaps the consciousness of man's superiority was slipping away. The woman was not his rival, only his equal in directions other than his own.

He leant upon the balustrade beside a pillar, and looked out upon the garden, out upon the water darkly flashing with the deep glint of night, like the light of a gem.

Still the same indefinable feeling that will not admit appeasement. Not a thought shaped itself. Nothing seemed to clear the mental vision. How absurd! Incomprehension to assail him, whose keen insight led him daily to pierce straight to the heart of things!

"You hardly expected so soon to have your wish fulfilled?"

Dallas started as though he were shot.

"Fulfilled!" he answered presently, with something akin to suppressed passion in his voice. "Fulfilled? it is but just awakened. I desire now to hear you sing."

"That is impossible—I do not sing."

Dallas was surprised to hear the change of voice, and her almost startled manner of speaking.

"But if I ask you?"

"Not now—not now—perhaps alone."

"Thank you; I will remember."

He wondered why she appeared so disturbed. The tesselated pavement clicked with the movement of many feet, as the people walked about.

Taking his arm, they joined the throng.

There is perhaps no place easier, or yet more difficult, than crowded drawing-rooms for private converse. One's attention being continually drawn

off by the observation of one's surroundings, conversation assumes a sketchy character. People's words floating behind them are caught up by the passers-by; phrases become so fashioned that they may just convey the meaning and no more. Hence one often carries away the memory of a word or even a look full of more meaning than would have been given by fully expressed sentences.

Still, Miss Dalrymple talked upon general subjects. To women of her training topics easily suggest themselves, and she is mistress of the art of entertainment. But Dallas interjected,

"I understand now the 'raison d'etre' of the daily two-hours' practice."

"Well, do you consider the result to be worth the effort?"

"Worth it?" he exclaimed, and then paused. "Perhaps," he continued, "but it depends upon the motive."

"The motive! You puzzle me. The world usually holds music to be its own sweet reward without regard to motive."

"And is it so with you?"

"Undoubtedly; one cannot hope to become an artist unless one's art should inspire with passion. Half-hearted artists cannot be."

"Yes, that is quite true, but another reason was passing through my mind."

"Yes. I understood you—perfectly—but we will allow that to pass. A woman's nature is complex, and motives and ideals become blended in a manner not always understandable by men."

"Evidently that belief has become an axiom."

She replied with a pleasant laugh that seemed to clear the atmosphere of its trifling doubt.

"I fear your Polish Dance is now wasted," he resumed; "you will need to visit Hallam's again."

They were standing in the doorway of one of the French windows, having paused on the threshold of the salon.

The people, as they passed in the colonnade, observed them with some interest as they talked together. Perhaps something in their mien indicated a difference in manner towards each other.

"Yes," she replied, "since your gift has supplanted me."

"My gift! How did you know?"

"How do I know of so many things that seem to concern you?" she said, somewhat archly.

"Clairvoyance?" he queried.

There was a slight negative movement of the head, and looking fairly into his eyes, she smiled.

"You would hardly believe me were I to tell you."

"Tell me."

"Simply by observation," she said nonchalantly. He did not believe her.

"One thing more I observe," she continued; "you do not believe me."

Dallas moved uneasily. Miss Dalrymple again glanced towards him—a look that had almost coquetry in its swiftness,—and laughed a soft, low laugh as she moved away.

Dallas stood still, striving, perhaps, to glean the meaning of word, look and action. He watched her join a throng assembled near the piano, and heard her voice unconcernedly taking up the discussion, evincing her complete forgetfulness of the past ten minutes.

Dallas slowly turned, and crossing the colonnade, leant once more upon the balustrade next to the pillar. He had something more to think about; a dim sense haunted him that he was playing a game in which he had not the controlling of the moves.

But he was simply experiencing the power which a beautiful woman is able to wield over the feelings of even a cool, deliberate man of the world. He strove to divert himself. Half turning, he noticed the appearance, the manner, the bearing of the couples as they passed him,—their pleasant

unrestrained talk about trifles, the ready smile, the lightsomeness of spirit, their insouciance, now and then varied with the ponderousness of those who seem never able to view the lighter delicacy of life.

But observation of this nature proved itself to be an insufficient corrective for Dallas's perturbation.

He joined one or two friends; they chatted about trifles, and the daily occurrences. He glanced casually into the drawing-room, resumed part in the conversation, looked up and down the colonnade, and felt generally an impatience with others as well as with himself.

"The Judge has come across an old friend," remarked one; "Major Somebody, on furlough from India. He succeeded in finding for him a congenial whist-partner, and he has been stationary all the evening."

"Yes, by-the-bye, Major Philtop," responded Dallas, "I meant to have made myself known to him. Let us go to the library."

They proceeded along the colonnade, around the side of the house, and passing in at the entrance hall, entered the library.

Dallas was not astonished to find the room crowded with occupants. It was the customary order of things. The assemblage, under the presiding genius of the Judge himself—who doubtless bore in mind happy remembrances of the club life of younger days—presented a spectacle of bubbling-over good spirits. Even smoking on these occasions was permitted, while every one seemed to have something to say, and the moment to be opportune. Men stood, sat, smoked, and talked as they listed, no one being more appreciative of a story than Judge Jerome.

Yet, in the neighbourhood of the bow-window two tables were surrounded by whist players, who carried on their game heedless of the passing talk.

Approaching his host, Dallas exchanged a few words, and then mentioned he would like to be presented to Major Philtop, "for, you know," he said, "he and my father were school-fellows."

"Of course, Dallas, of course. Come with me. Philtop, whom do you think we have here?"

They drew near the table where the game was in progress. Major Philtop raised not his eyes, but proceeded deliberately with his play, picking up the last two tricks.

"Three," he said, marking the points on his whist-counter; "honours are even. It is your deal."

Then he turned towards the two gentlemen, and leisurely scanned the younger man.

"Do you recollect a school-mate named Dallas?" continued the Judge.

"Egad, yes. You don't mean to say this is Dallas's boy? By jove, it is so; he is cut in the same shape as his father. Did not dream to meet you at this end of the world. How are you, how—— ah!"

The Major abruptly left off his hand-shaking, and resumed the seat from which he had risen in a moment of excitement.

The turned-up card had indicated the completion of the deal.

"You must leave Philtop alone, Dallas, until he has finished his whist," said the Judge, carrying off his guest to the other end of the room.

Half amused, Dallas found a seat among the coterie who seemed to form the Judge's entourage. Many of them were familiar guests, and were bent upon passing a pleasant hour.

Easily the talk flowed on with ever-varying subject and mood, and just sufficiently tinctured with the "personal" to give piquancy.

The merry quip, the racy tale, the witty rejoinder, the infectious laugh, the curt remark—how they succeeded each other, and carried one away with the delights of good fellowship.

Judge Jerome passed the cigar-case towards Dallas. Selecting one, he proceeded to snip the end, and with a "Thank you," accepted a lighted match from his neighbour.

Five minutes later he slowly rose from his chair, moved about the room, and presently passed out.

The Judge noticed him. "The Major's off-handedness has hurt him," he said to himself.

Dallas removed his cigar, and as he came upon the colonnade, threw it into the garden. He glanced through the drawing-rooms, betook himself to the long dining-room, where a host of visitors were partaking of refreshments.

He exchanged a few words with an acquaintance or two, as he helped himself to claret, and then, once more, alone by himself, he looked out over the balustrade.

Miss Dalrymple had departed. Unconsciously Dallas had been learning the fact.

The delight which comes of movement, of colour, of light, of music, and the ever-flowing sound of voices, the undercurrent of excitement, the charm of human intercourse in its pleasantest form, all yielded place now to the desire of being alone.

He sought out his hostess.

"Going," Mrs. Jerome exclaimed, "so early!—I cannot spare you.—Not to be thought of. It was quite enough for Miss Dalrymple to have deserted us, although there is some excuse in her case, that she has another engagement. By-the-bye, Keith, tell me how you came to know Miss Dalrymple?"

"I believe Miss Dalrymple goes out a great deal," replied Dallas.

"True, she is much sought after," concurred Mrs. Jerome.

"But I had first the pleasure of meeting her in the Bank, when one morning she happened to come in; for in these days it is necessary even for ladies to keep banking accounts."

"Now, Keith, you interest me. I have several times wondered what inducement has led Miss Dalrymple to Australia. A young lady—for she is really quite young—to come here alone, to live at an hotel, to go about in the most independent manner,—perhaps—is she wealthy, Keith?"

Mrs. Jerome broke off abruptly as though suddenly possessed of the idea. Dallas only laughed.

"I really do not know; she is less known to me than to yourself, for, I confess, my speculations, if I have ever indulged in such a subject, have not led me so far, as you seem already to have progressed."

"Oh, but you men never do think. Do you imagine, for instance, that she can be an artist?"

"She is a most accomplished musician," replied Dallas.

"No, I mean, do you think she paints,—comes here to study scenery, you know?"

"It is beyond my powers of guessing," said Dallas, stolidly. "Perhaps," he suggested, "she intends to write a book about us."

"I believe, now, you are perfectly right," exclaimed Mrs. Jerome, most impressively. "Except for such a purpose, no one with such beauty and so charming would come here in this unexpected manner, and yet appear so indifferent as to the sensation she makes—for she has made a sensation"—Mrs. Jerome added confidently, "One felt instinctively she had some other object,—but we will talk about her another time," she concluded as some people approached.

"I shall hope, then, that you will tell me what characters may be expected to figure in the book," answered Dallas, laughingly. "Good-night."

"Good-bye, Keith."

Ascending the stairs, Dallas re-possessed himself of his light overcoat and hat, and passed out through the tiled hall resounding with the constant passage of footsteps, out beyond the circle of light, out through the open gateway, and presently in the

silent street he paced with slow thoughtful steps. His hand had already sought in his overcoat pocket for the inevitable case, and in no hurry to reach home, he turned down towards the Bay, and continued along the hill towards Bayswater-road. It was a quiet and peaceful stroll, and yet as he turned in at the gate of his lodgings, there was a decided air of impatience about his every movement which was strangely unusual with him.

CHAPTER V.

IS A MAN'S TRUST JUSTIFIED?

'True friendship depends on similarity of taste, and difference of temperaments." —Georges Sand.

About this time there began to exhibit themselves in the banking world those periodic indications of uneasiness which provide for the business classes just that degree of irregular excitement for which less fortunate people are fain to frequent the gambling tables.

The clerks, unconscious of looming disturbances doggedly droned, or raced, through their daily work, harping on the universal refrain of insufficiency of pay and slow promotion.

The higher officers, who were admitted into the inner secrets of affairs, feeling a natural anxiety as to the future, were carefully scrutinising every transaction that might throw light on the probable course of events, because it is the unexpected which always happens.

There was already to be noticed instances of that hesitancy in speculation and enterprise which is always the fore-runner of a more serious state of things. It denoted the proverbial failure of confidence. The reckless doings of the few outsiders who, fancying the opportunity of their life to have come, forthwith plunge-in, were unable to stem the steady onward torrent of dull trade setting in. Only a goldfield being discovered upsets the ordained order of things. Now, every one, unable to see into the future for himself, strove to glean that knowledge from his fellow, possibly admitting in his

heart of hearts that the other is the wiser. At all events, he is more absolutely certain of his own deficiencies than of his neighbour's, when it comes to be a question of decision as to the yet unknown.

Whatever the opinion may be at other times, and without doubt there are always some who dimly discern the need of certain action, and unconsciously following a course which suggests itself by some happy chance or instinct, earn for themselves thereafter the reputation of keen business insight, shrewd forethought, and so forth, when the wheel of fortune having deposited her favours for the time being in their hands, qualified them for directorates.

But the Banks have more tangible evidence of the mercurial state of financial barometers. Each customer's banking account reflects the working of his mind, and it becomes necessary to separate the reckless from the deliberate, and mentally to gauge the extent and value of the aggregate result.

Following the course adopted by all the more careful Banks, it was usual for one of the officers of the Bank of Australia to prepare every morning a synopsis of the previous day's transactions, setting forth not only the business that had taken place with the Bank's customers, but also with the other Banks individually. This summary was handed either to the accountant or the sub-accountant for annotation or remarks before being forwarded to the manager.

Dallas, however, upon his appointment to his office, perceiving the importance of this tell-tale summary, caused the return to be made out in copying ink, and a press copy taken for his own use. This was also supplemented by a further comprehensive review of each week's business, and was made up on the Tuesday morning, as accurately as could be gathered from the figures, pending the taking-out of the weekly abstract from the balances of Monday night.

For some two or three weeks Dallas had remarked a constantly growing tendency in the figures which a comparison with the corresponding period of last year but tended to confirm. Examining in detail the particulars rendered by each department, it was evident that while some classes of business maintained their normal state, others betrayed a certain excitement in the irregular rise and fall of transactions.

As Dallas on this Tuesday morning scanned the weekly totals, he found himself making many more notes than usual, and at length deemed it advisable to confer with the accountant. Together they continued their investigations, broadly summarising the erratic movement to be due to three classes of business accounts—certain commercial traders, some independent men with moderate holding of property, and certain agents identified with speculative enterprise.

Rapidly they turned up the different accounts as they came to mind, noting the often large increases quite beyond the movements of normal growth. But few words were spoken as the index finger rested on the significant figures. To each of these men they told their own tale.

"It is well you drew attention to the matter," said the accountant, "for undoubtedly many of these accounts will need more careful watchfulness. I will ask the manager to give his own instructions."

Leaving Dallas still perusing the working of the accounts, the accountant leisurely made his way towards the manager's room as though inflation of business was but a matter of ordinary occurrence.

The manager, meeting the accountant in the hall learnt in a few sentences as to the enquiry which his officers had been making.

"Yes," he replied, "all this has been long expected, and any ill result is being guarded against. I think you have all the necessary instructions.—

stay, I may as well see some of the accounts in which we are most interested."

Leading the way towards the ledgers, the manager passed from one book to another rapidly glancing down the accounts of many old constituents.

"Yes, it is exactly as we have estimated, the older and well-established businesses are maintaining their ordinary rate of transactions. This rush is due to those numerous new firms, half importers and half agents for foreign firms. They are seeking to establish themselves with the help of undue credit to buyers. We must see that their accounts preserve credit balances, and take extra care with the discounts."

"But the increase of transactions is noticeable in other accounts, besides those of importers," explained the accountant. "Here, for instance," he continued, referring to one he had already inspected with Dallas; "this man is an old customer possessed of independent means, but see how ——"

"Pooh! he is only seized with a touch of land-mania, house-buying, or something. He thinks values will rise again." He shrugged his shoulders, "there are hundreds more like him. See that these do not overdraw without reference to me, that is all."

"I ought to mention also," pursued the accountant, "that some of the exchanges with the Banks are showing rather remarkable developments."

"Yes, yes, the same thing—over-speculation; they will be wiser later on."

"The Traders' Bank, however," chimed in Dallas, "exhibits somewhat different features. For five weeks the balance of exchange has been against them to a large extent."

"Well," responded the manager, "did you assure yourself as to its cause?"

The somewhat supercilious tone of the manager nettled Dallas, for in his judgment these matters

demanded far more serious attention than his chief seemed disposed to give them.

"Chiefly due to the large number of notes which we return," answered Dallas rather curtly.

"Quite so. The Traders' Bank is increasing its business, perhaps, too rapidly."

This ended the short conversation. The manager returned to his room, and the accountant passed into his own office.

Dallas remained, experiencing a feeling of disgust. The staff had unquestioning faith in the business acumen of the manager. He had proved himself both able and far-seeing, and had steadily progressed from post to post, until he was appointed to the management of the Sydney office,—a rapid promotion such as could be obtained only by marked ability, and the possession of strength and decision of character. However, Dallas could not but respect the opinions to which he had just given utterance, and endeavour to feel his own concern had been somewhat needless.

The manager's allusions, however, to new trading firms recklessly struggling for the acquisition of business naturally caused the account of Miss Dalrymple to occur to mind.

Dallas stepped across to the ledger-desk. The "D" ledger-keeper being absent, he took up the index and, ascertaining the folio, turned up Miss Dalrymple's account. It was perfectly in order, and showed a considerable credit balance to have been maintained. But as Dallas turned over the three or four pages of the account, something akin to dismay seized upon him. The abnormal increase of the transactions was beyond reason, and appeared to be simply fulfilling the manager's words. It was impossible for all her transactions to be conducted with "cash," and consequently there must be the usual proportionate amount of credit given. The account was being well financed, as far as the Bank

was concerned, but to what extent was she contracting liabilities with other wholesale houses?

Dallas shuddered; he saw but too well the inevitable result.

A woman—a new-comer—unaccustomed to Australian methods of trade—apparently without advisers, but supplied evidently with stocks to an unlimited extent—what hope could she have of safely passing through those pitfalls of mercantile life, wherein merchants, who have grown old in business, but too often find themselves at fault? The account was openly carried on, indicating, so far as the larger cheques were concerned, the firms with whom she dealt, and the sums paid in seemed to be all "trade" receipts.

Dallas's face was very grave, as he walked slowly towards his office.

"She cannot transact business for cash only," he repeated to himself. "I must learn from her the amount of credit she allows, and to whom. . . . But how to learn!"

Dallas was sitting back in his chair reflecting on these matters, full of concern for a lady in whom he felt an acknowledged interest, and of dread for the future. Instinctively he knew that this proud, accomplished woman would never endure the disgrace of seeing herself branded a mercantile defaulter. He did not ask himself what would happen when the crash came; but the sudden, quick movement of decision with which he took up his pen and set himself to work, avowed a determination to direct her course.

At this moment the messenger appeared at the door, and ushered into the room—Miss Dalrymple.

Dallas hastily arose with an air of startled astonishment so plainly depicted upon his face as could not escape observation.

Her smile almost faded away as the quick penetrating glance essayed to discover the cause of his change of countenance.

With a hesitancy of manner that seemed foreign to her, she began slowly, as she seated herself:

"I appear to be falling into the habit of coming to you whenever advice is needed."

A pleased look came over Dallas's face, as he replied:

"You may be quite sure that nothing gives me more pleasure than to find myself of service to you."

"Thank you, Mr. Dallas, but I will not trench long upon your time to-day. I wish to cable £1500 to London. I have just paid in the balance of the amount, and would be glad if you would kindly remit the sum as soon as the cheques have all been collected."

£1500 to London?" queried Dallas, with some constraint in his voice.

Matters were assuming another phase not dreamt of in his calculations.

She glanced towards him, the tone of his remark having evidently struck upon her attention, and motioned assent with a slight betrayal of surprise.

"Doubtless you wish this money to reach London on a given date, to meet maturing liabilities?"

"No, it is not to discharge a liability."

Dallas listened with blank expression.

"I presume there can be no objection to cabling money to London even though unaccompanied by any previous advice or instructions?"

The very faint tinge of asperity in the voice recalled Dallas to himself. Evidently his conclusions had been altogether erroneous, and Miss Dalrymple must be possessed of resources of which he possessed no knowledge.

"I beg your pardon," he replied, perceptibly relieved in mind, "of course there is no objection, and I shall have great pleasure in at once preparing the cable. Will you, please, give me the particulars?"

"The name is John Duluth and Son, but they have a cable address, 'Dulson.' "

"That will be sufficient," replied Dallas ,"our London office will advise them."

"In that case I shall be enabled to curtail my own cable of advice, and limit it to the matter in hand."

Ringing his gong, Dallas gave instructions to a clerk to prepare for Miss Dalrymple's signature the usual cable form for transmitting £1500 to London to "Dulson."

"I suppose you adopt a code for transactions of this nature?"

"Oh, yes! Three or four words convey the necessary intelligence to London. Cable transfers are daily coming more into use."

"Your banking arrangements certainly appear to offer unusual facilities for the conduct of business. I have had some little experience in most countries, but really believe that not even in England do traders receive as much—what shall I call it—co-operation?"

"It is a system, without doubt, peculiar to Australia, but it appears to be well adapted to the conditions of the country, but, as in every other business, there is an unknown quantity that has to be reckoned with."

"And that is?" Miss Dalrymple questioned.

"Our too-intimate connection with the financial world of London."

"But why should such be considered a disadvantage?"

"Because the knowledge of our country and ourselves is not commensurate with the largeness of the interests at stake."

"I have heard repeated," assented Miss Dalrymple, "some curious stories of newspaper mistakes, and on the part of individuals who apparently first begin to develop an interest in Australia, when their sons—not their daughters, I notice—announce

their intention of coming hither; but surely ignorance of this nature must be a thing of the past among those who have regularly traded for years with Australia."

"No, our English race seems, in a certain sense, to be slow to learn. It will place faith in the irresponsible vapourings of writers one hardly ever heard of, or in those who have never seen Australia, rather than in the long record of continually-growing trade and production. I suppose it is owing to the English press having always been so true to British interests that it cannot be believed to be now at fault. But, without doubt, these writers are prejudicially affecting Australian affairs through lack of discretion and closer inquiry."

"Perhaps Australia is too far off," suggested Miss Dalrymple, with a suggestion of banter in her tone. She liked to hear Dallas speaking in his serious, earnest way, often with an unconscious touch of irony.

"If that were so, our affairs should appear roseate-hued, instead of sombre," replied Dallas.

"Ah, but distance lends no enchantment to money."

Dallas laughed quietly. It was very pleasant to converse with a lady who added the charm of beautiful womanhood to the shrewd common-sense of a man of business.

The clerk entered, and placed on the table the application form for cable transfer and the cable-message book. Dallas handed the first to the lady for her signature.

"Your cheque will be needed for the full amount of transfer and costs. You will see the several items set forth on the application form."

"Yes," said Miss Dalrymple, as drawing forth a pocket-tablet she proceeded to note down the particulars. "But I have no cheque with me. To carry a cheque-book in one's satchel constitutes a source

of too great temptation. I must ask you to oblige me with a blank form."

"Procure Miss Dalrymple a cheque-form," said Dallas, and the clerk disappeared.

"Your cable consists of five words," he continued, "one word for the London address, one for our own, and three for the message."

"Curt enough," remarked Miss Dalrymple; and will that be sufficient to instruct your people in London to forward the money to Messrs. Duluth and Son?"

"Yes, each word signifies a phrase."

"'Dulson folly reason,' are those the three words?" she asked, reading the cable as her eyes fell upon the open book. "Would it not sound more appropriate if it read, 'Dulson reason folly'?"

She spoke laughingly, and proceeded to fill in the cheque-form which the clerk handed to her.

But Dallas suffered a sharp pang of annoyance, and as he watched her writing, made no reply to her remark.

"Grace Dalrymple" was signed with a decision that betokened a strength of character capable of carrying to an issue any determination of will.

The laughing expression was still in her eyes as she looked up with a frank, almost soft, glance.

"Thank you," said Dallas, as he received the cheque, and attaching it to the application-form, handed both to the clerk.

"Give these to the teller," he said.

"Yes, sir," responded the clerk, and departed.

Miss Dalrymple was drawing on her glove.

"The deposit I paid-in," she said, "was composed of several cheques; do you not first ascertain if they be correct before you remit these fifteen hundred pounds?"

Seized with the instinct that comes to those who study character, Dallas instantly replied:

"No, because I trust you."

She lifted her glance without moving the head.

A new light had leapt into her eyes, but quickly the eyelashes fell again.

Dallas felt that he had something more to remember.

"It is not business-like," she murmured.

She finished buttoning her glove, and rose to leave.

"Good-bye," she said, and passed quietly from the office.

Dallas noticed her mien to be different from that which he had at any time previously observed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEGINNINGS OF A COMMERCIAL CRISIS.

"Let's teach ourselves that honourable stop,
Not to outsport discretion." —Othello.

Dallas resumed his chair, but not his work. What was he to think now?

He crushed out at once the half thought that Miss Dalrymple might be capable of using those code words of which she knew the purport.

The man's feelings had reached that state in which loyalty to the woman becomes his uppermost sentiment.

He sat toying with his pen, speculating upon the manner in which she appeared to be financing her account, without, apparently, possessing any capital. He knew, of course, that all these sums could not be paid in without equivalent payments being disbursed for purchases. Yet she had said that this remittance was not to meet a liability!

While thus deliberating, the ledger-keeper appeared with a cheque in his hand.

"This cheque," he explained, "is drawn against deposits which are not yet cleared."

Dallas glanced at it. "You may pay it," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

The clerk still hesitated.

"Some of the cheques paid-in are drawn on the country, and two on Melbourne."

There was a hardly perceptible pause. "For how much are the Melbourne cheques?"

"The two cheques together, exceed three hundred pounds."

Dallas took up his pen and initialled the top corner of Miss Dalrymple's cheque.

"Yes," was all he said.

"I will bring the deposit-slip, sir," said the ledger-keeper. Dallas made no answer, but mechanically took the slip when the clerk returned, and examined the names of the drawers of the cheques, which were endorsed on the slip.

He gave a slight nod of the head as he handed it back to the ledger-keeper. As the latter left the office with the documents, he looked backwards at Dallas. He thought, evidently, the proceeding was not after the usual fashion of the sub-accountant.

"It is strange," said Dallas to himself. "She appears to be doing business with a number of good houses, as though she were an importing merchant—a woman importer," he repeated to himself in a peculiar tone, as it were. His reasonings quickly embraced all the probabilities co-incident with such trade, and he was forced to admit the surmise agreed with the working of the banking account.

"She can hardly be a mere manufacturer's agent, or we should have had some advice—perhaps, an agent of Morier and Co!" he suddenly thought, "a commercial traveller in their employment!" There was a gesture of impatience; intuitively he seemed to have conceived distrust of this unknown firm.

He recollected her reference to the necessity of her having the entree to good houses, in the interests of her business. The remembrance of her words now stirred him most strangely.

"Not that, not that thing! Impossible, too humiliating. No, no. She evidently sells on her own account, and desires her social position to be such as to secure her more consideration from merchants. But if she conducts her own operations, she will be known as an importer, and, as yet, no one is aware of it. She must work through somebody else . . . Morier and Co. Ah!"

Dallas hastily rose and advanced towards the

door, intending to further consult her account in the ledger. But he restrained himself, and, instead, took his hat from off the hat-rack above his working desk, which stood in one corner of the office. With quick steps he went through the banking chamber, and out into the street. He was now thoroughly disturbed, and, wishing to be alone, he sought the crowded street.

Could he reconcile his supposition with his knowledge of her affairs, so far as that acquaintance went?

Possibly, had he merely the account to deal with, he would simply have used ordinary care until there should come the inevitable request for accommodation, when he would have required full explanation as to the position of the interested parties; or else have desired the closing-off of the account.

But the account was Miss Dalrymple's.

Rightly or wrongly the dread incident of the cable message persisted in recurring to his mind.

Had he better inform the Manager, or allow him to cable a warning to London, advising a discontinuance of those words of the code? For some time he walked along, seeing, yet not observing, in his preoccupation, while he seemed to look for solution of his question, after the manner of one who does not seek to direct his thoughts, but rather as though he wished to allow his conclusions to shape themselves without effort of will. At length he turned round with decisive movement. He had made up his mind. He would not publicly express doubt to the Bank of Miss Dalrymple. Every sense within him seemed to revolt against the disloyalty. It involved condemnation of a lady without, perhaps, just cause, and its effects might be most harmful and far reaching.

He would bide the events of the next few days, and if any of these doubts should receive unwelcome confirmation, he would seek on his own responsibility to privately bring about an ending of the ac-

count! An ending of the account! As the idea suggested itself, his sense of manliness rose up in oppositon to such abandonment of a lady in difficulties—a stranger in a strange land, and necessarily unaware of the dangers and quicksands peculiar to the different methods of business current in Australian cities.

"If she would but trust me with a full knowledge of her affairs!" he repeated to himself again and again.

He waited. The days passed, burdened with the increasing volume of commerce, the while being fully persuaded that the eve of a very difficult period was at hand. Dallas scrutinised more closely than ever the details of each day's business, which might be calculated to throw light upon the progress of events.

There was plainly noticeable a feverishness in trade; there was no rest, no pause; people seemed to enter upon new undertakings, before previous transactions had been closed off. The fear of being "left" spurred traders on to still riskier ventures. In the midst of the prevalent gambling, it was needed for the Banks to keep cool. To keep cool! and at a time when the least opposition caused a customer to seek the assistance of a change of Bank.

In "flush" times, it was easy for even weak banks to vastly increase their connection, and now many times every day, Dallas was called upon to exercise all his tact, and calmly argue against the impetuosity of a man striding on the road to fortune.

Each day he looked for a visit from Miss Dalrymple, and each day he carefully noted the movement of her account. In passing over the matter of her reading the cable message, he felt that he had committed himself to his trust in her integrity, and yet it was a circumstance that would probably never be known to her.

The first of the month arrived with its immense

disbursement of Government funds, swelled also, by its being "pay-day" for insurance and other companies, for merchants' offices, and for all the larger shops and stores. There was the getting-out of monthly accounts on the part of traders, and the usual vigorous canvass to get-in all the money possible to meet the usual engagements falling due upon the "fourth" of the month.

The Banks had doubled their "telling-staff," and the money flowed backwards and forwards like gathering and recoiling waves, markedly alike in general tenor, but each one receding and reaching to a different point. Some had gained ground, but others had lost.

Each individual instance required to be noted by the Banks, deliberated upon, and dealt with.

Then in the midst of the swirl came the morning of the "fourth." The clocks had scarcely struck nine before the exchange clerks were banging upon the desks in the Exchange the heavy pile of bills. With feverish haste the receiving Banks entered up the long list in their respective books. The documents were seized upon ere yet the last figures were written, and carried off to the ledgers by the distributing clerks of the respective Banks.

There was a rapid sorting of wheat from the chaff by the ledger-keepers, and they viewed with greater or less dismay the residuum of doubtful documents that remained in their hands. A quick turning over of leaves indicated the progress from account to account, as the clerk proceeded to ascertain if any had been unexpectedly provided for. One by one, others became tossed down on the desk, as accounts were found to be sufficiently in funds. Then there was recourse to the receiving-tellers, to learn if any remittances had come by mail, and, finally, each ledger-keeper awaited with his handful of rejected bills and cheques, until the authorities should decide upon eventual payment or dishonour.

An ill chance of obtaining accommodation has the man who ventures to leave until the "fourth" the making of arrangements with his Bank. The Manager, the Accountant, the Sub-Accountant, with every faculty bearing upon the difficulties and problems presented by a half-hundred different accounts with coinciding or conflicting interests, are called upon simultaneously to decide upon the course and current of business.

Long experience teaches them to appreciate the extent of disaster that follows upon an error of judgment. Human knowledge fails to foresee whether acceptance of risk will lead to profit or loss, or, being declined, will ruin unnecessarily a valuable business.

Weighed with the sense of responsibility of this nature, Dallas approached the "D" ledger. He felt instinctively that to-day his judgment would be accepted by both of his superiors, and that if he recommended the payment of all Miss Dalrymple's bills, they would regard him as being possessed of a knowledge and insight into her position of affairs sufficient to warrant this exercise of judgment, and their deference to it. And yet, if they should appeal to him for his reasons for belief in her stability, what argument could he adduce?

He went through the list of doubtful documents handed to him by the ledger-keeper. A glance showed that there were none of Grace Dalrymple's, and, with unfeigned relief, he proceeded to deal with the bills and cheques "drawn" on sundry accounts. After disposing of these, he said casually to the ledger-keeper, glancing the while towards the mass of "passed" bills lying on the desk, "I see Miss Dalrymple has provided for all her engagements."

"Grace Dalrymple, sir," he exclaimed, "I do not think she has drawn any bills to-day."

"No bills!" responded Dallas in utter astonishment.

"I do not remember seeing the name," continued the ledger-keeper, running his fingers through the mass of papers, and revealing the name and amount of each document.

"Stay, here are a few cheques, but only for small amounts."

"I suppose you have received the exchange from the Merchants' Bank?" asked Dallas. He referred to the Bank which had the account of Morier and Co.

"Yes, sir, all the exchanges have come in."

Dallas passed on.

Half an hour elapsed before the usual engagements of the "fourth" were finally dealt with, and the dishonoured bills handed back to the exchange-clerks.

Dallas then betook himself to his office, and began in a perfunctory manner to peruse the correspondence. His mind returned to the question of Miss Dalrymple's prospective liabilities. It seemed unaccountable that she should have been accorded such extended credit. However much she might inspire creditors with confidence, still Dallas knew the unsentimentality of ordinary business dealing would prompt merchants to use caution until they should have learnt of their debtor having established a sound connection, and it is not to be supposed that this marvel should have been accomplished in a few months. Dallas really wanted to know from whom Miss Dalrymple secured her stock, not that he had any suspicion of improper trading, but because he knew of the extraordinary difficulties attending the inception of any new venture, and naturally feared that a stranger would be unequal to the task of coping with the continually recurring risks and dangers.

So far as he had been able to discover, Miss Dalrymple was purchasing for cash, but with the evidently small capital at command, it was not to be supposed that she should have, for instance, a

surplusage of £1500 to remit to England. The local creditors must either "go short," or she must receive consignments from London indented through another firm,—for Dallas was aware that her name did not appear among the consignees of imported stocks. In spite, therefore, of his self-reasoning, he felt perturbed as day by day he witnessed the increase of transactions passing through her account, without being able to assign thereto a logical foundation of stability.

The morning of the "fifth," with its heavy country correspondence, containing reports as to the fate of bills domiciled with branches and agents, taxed the working capacity of the staff almost as heavily as the preceding day. The result of the payments afforded a sure index as to the state of trade in the country, and largely dependent thereupon was the preparedness of the Bank to discount fresh bills for the Sydney wholesale houses.

The discounting of bills being under the immediate supervision of the Manager, Dallas was wont to give but cursory attention to the Bill Department, and therefore, on this date, despatched direct to the Manager's room any letters having reference to this subject.

Some time later in the day, Dallas was somewhat astonished to receive an unaccustomed visit from the Manager. He was even more surprised when his chief, instead of giving, in his usual quick, almost abrupt, manner, some precise instructions, or requiring some information in reply to short, direct inquiry, began to speak of casual matters. Presently he asked Dallas if he kept up any comparative record as to the periodical payment of bills?

"Something suggests to me," said the Manager, "that an unusual amount of 'bill-renewing' is now being carried on, in a manner suggestive of growth of business—quite, however, imaginary. There is too much 'make-believe.' Really," he continued, "a commercial crisis occasionally, is as advan-

tageous as a city fire in clearing away the weak concerns."

"Yes," agreed Dallas, "if we can only keep ourselves free from the cause and effect."

"Of course," said the Manager decisively.

Dallas waited for him to continue.

But the Manager alluded to nothing definitely, and in a few minutes took his departure.

The sub-accountant remained not a little disturbed.

"Whatever can have occurred to the chief?" he exclaimed to himself. "He has evidently ascertained something to be going wrong, and does not yet like to commit himself to an opinion. . . Wanted to find out what I thought of things in general. I wish, though, he had spoken out."

Still, a careful examination of all the accounts which were likely to cause anxiety, failed to disclose any state of immediate difficulty. There was simply noticeable the feature of over-trading to which attention had already been drawn, and as the Manager, confident in the value of his securities, had already somewhat superciliously treated this question, Dallas, having no fresh evidence to submit, did not care to again refer to the subject.

"The Manager," opined Dallas, "has evidently discovered that there is more cause for alarm than he is disposed to acknowledge."

Without exactly being able to point out any defect in the policy observed by the management, Dallas yet felt that insufficient effort was being made to secure greater consolidation of the business of the Bank. And yet, as he afterwards glanced through the weekly abstract, and noted the excessive reserve of coin, and knew that similar strong reserves were collected at other centrally placed branches, he felt bound to admit that proper precaution had been observed at all times.

Then, in succession, he reviewed the other items of the abstract, the Government securities held

—some in London, some in Australia, apparently wherever they could be most easily realized upon the receipt of instructions from the Head Office.

Looking down the succession of figures, he paused at the several sums entered under the heading of liabilities, but which he knew were unclaimable, and experienced some feeling of surprise as he realized what a very large sum, in the aggregate, they represented. These were practically "Reserve Funds," unknown to the general public.

He compared the "discounts" and 'bills negotiated" with the relative "coin held," the total of which it was designed should be increased, as the bills daily matured, and, on the other hand, observed the proportion they bore to the "Mortgages."

Should the latter have been more restrained? he queried; and have borne a smaller proportion to the 'bills receivable?"

But, turning to the amounts held at "Fixed Deposit," he felt loth to admit that the Bank had committed any error in accepting so much business, particularly when, turning up the report on advances, he noticed how ample the margin appeared in the case of each regular overdraft, and how even the inevitable list of irregular accounts were either being satisfactorily "nursed," so as to produce a surplus, or else that the necessary provision had been already set apart to meet the deficiency.

"And yet we have all our hidden reserve funds in addition," said Dallas, as he closed up the Abstract-book with a satisfied air.

Not long afterwards, while conferring with the accountant, Dallas was asked if the manager had consulted him with reference to the London bills.

"Do you refer to this morning's London mail?"

"Yes, the increase noticed for some two or three months past has become still more marked this week."

"Still, London office is quite satisfied as to the value of the names of the drawers."

"Yes, cables have been despatched every week concerning this very question. 'London' holds that the business is worth the risk, and that even if the amount cannot be recovered at this end, we can safely fall back on the drawers or endorsers, and that to refuse to purchase these acceptances would drive good connections to other banks. All doubtful paper is allowed to pass to other Banks."

"That may be the London office point of view, but how are our customers to carry this load of liability which is beyond the necessities of trade?"

The accountant shrugged his shoulders, took up the blotting-pad, dropped it upon his table, and spread out his hands with a gesture, almost of dismay.

It was a question that could not be answered.

At that moment the manager entered the office holding a large bundle of papers in his hands.

He appeared greatly disturbed, and spoke with positive fierceness.

"I feel disinclined to give up these documents on acceptance."

He ran his right hand over the bills of lading he held in his left hand.

"The London consignors accept the risk," suggested the accountant, "and they are known to the London office."

"Yes, yes," petulantly responded the manager, "but all these are our own customers, and how can they continue to carry such stocks on hand unless they allow them to pass out of their hands on credit, and hold weak paper in their stead, entailing upon us continued renewals?"

"Would you propose throwing them upon the market?" queried the accountant.

"Better so," said the manager, "it will bring matters to an issue."

There was a long silence.

"We cannot hold the goods," continued the manager.

"The market could not bear such quantities thrown upon it. Other acceptances would be dangerously imperilled," submitted the accountant.

"I admit so much," said the manager, "but believe it will be the lesser of the two evils. A forcible check is better than a long drawn-out agony."

"True, if the other Banks could only be induced to take the same course of action."

"The Traders' Bank, for instance," interjected Dallas.

The manager turned towards him, but made no reply. The suggestion did not soothe him.

"What can possess London Banks to negotiate such quantities of commercial paper?" he exclaimed. "They must understand such forcing of trade to be unhealthy and impossible; that reaction must follow—with dullness—fall in prices—losses——" With sudden movement he turned and passed out of the office.

Dallas turned hastily to the accountant. "He has not determined upon any such course?"

"No, not yet; but with competition so strong in London, and the continuance of this unabated eagerness to buy bills on Australia, must lead to something serious. The manager is troubled because he is powerless to arrest this over-trading. His proposal would doubtless have some such effect, but at the expense of ruining our connection. It would be a good thing if some other Bank carried out the idea, but not our Bank."

Dallas returned to his own room, conscious of the grave issue that lay before them, and how forceful the stream that was sweeping onwards to the edge of the cataract in the distance. Nor could his thoughts help turning to one whom he knew would be one of the first to be overwhelmed in the disaster. And yet, he was powerless to even mitigate the fall.

The awfulness of a commercial crisis can only be understood and appreciated by those who have passed through the experience.

As he entered his office from the inner side, Miss Dalrymple appeared at the other door.

CHAPTER VII.

BECOMING ENTANGLED.

"I am content to be that which thou wilt,
Tho' humble be my pathway and obscure,
Yet from all stain of guilt
Keep thou me pure."

—Lewis Morris.

Miss Dalrymple's manner betrayed some trepidation, but too slight to challenge attention.

Dallas, unfeignedly pleased to see her, moved across the room with a grave smile of welcome, and then placing a chair near the table, waited for her to speak. He knew her visits were always due to matters of some moment needing discussion, and he also understood that Miss Dalrymple was accustomed to approach the subject-in-hand with business-like directness.

And now promptly seating herself after a somewhat terse greeting, she drew some letters from her reticule, and straightway began:

"I have just received my London mail, and will you please read this advice from Lintott and Co. You may remember my having remitted £1500 by cable a few days ago. I may tell you the amount was sent to pay for a line of goods. They are already on the way hither, and now this letter tells me Lintott have dispatched the very same kind of goods valued at . . . £769 3s. 4d., she continued, reading from the invoice. "They cannot be sold," she added, suddenly looking towards him.

"Refuse to take delivery," Dallas coolly remarked, "the consignment not having been ordered."

"I cannot venture to do so; yet if the shipment were to be sold at auction, the market would be spoiled for my own order; and, moreover," she hesitated slightly, "I do not wish Lintott to know of my having sent an order to Duluth."

Dallas waited for the situation to explain itself more fully.

"These goods are specialities, and will be useless if not sold in two or three weeks. In a fortnight, I find, Lintott's consignment will be delivered; my own order about three weeks later. Unless further consideration should suggest a different course, I propose to dispose of the first lot in this city as quickly as possible. Should the goods 'take' well, it is probable a large proportion of the second consignment may be placed in other cities of Australia. Should no one else be importing to any extent, or only indenting sample lots, the venture will be highly profitable; but if I have been anticipated—ah, well!"

And she shrugged her shoulders.

"If the first consignment will not arrive before a fortnight," suggested Dallas, "it might be worth while to visit two other cities in the interim. We could supply you with letters to our Bank or agents, and perhaps they might materially assist you."

"Thank you, Mr. Dallas, but I fear such a course would disclose my business. I have admitted you to my confidence, but I wish none else to know, chiefly for social reasons, which you already understand. However, if you do not mind, I shall discuss the matter with you later on, inasmuch as a dealing of this nature will carry me into paths calculated to prove my inexperience in ways Australian. By-the-bye, can you tell me through which Bank the draft will be presented; Lintott and Co. state they have negotiated it through the London Union Bank."

"We act as agents for the London Union Bank, and, therefore, the draft will be forwarded through

our London Office. Probably it will have arrived in this morning's mail."

Dallas touched his bell; a clerk appeared.

"Ask Mr. Addison if he has received a London bill for— What was the amount?"

"£769 3s. 4d."

"For £769 3s. 4d., drawn by Lintott and Co., on Miss Dalrymple."

In a few minutes, the clerk returned with the bill in question.

Dallas perused the docket of instructions attached to the bill, and noticed that there were no alterations or erasures of the printed matter, indicating that drawers were consigning to Miss Dalrymple on the same terms accorded to all other constituents. Dallas gathered therefrom, with much satisfaction, that she must be most favourably known to Lintott and Co.

As he glanced up, he perceived Miss Dalrymple to have been steadily regarding him.

"This is the draft you referred to," he said, speaking with a quiet assured tone; "but it is not to be presented for acceptance until the arrival of the 'Oruba.' It is drawn at ninety days after sight." he added.

"The usual rebate being allowed?" she questioned.

"If retired before maturity?—certainly; but this bill is not negotiated."

"Not negotiated!" exclaimed Miss Dalrymple. "Then, are there any special instructions as to non-acceptance, or non-payment?"

"No, only the usual course to be followed."

"And that is?"

Dallas hesitated, resenting this cross-questioning.

"I beg your pardon," she said quickly, "I really forgot that was purely the Bank's concern. However, the matter is quite immaterial, for I hope to tell you this afternoon that I shall be prepared to

accept on arrival, and retire within thirty days. And now, I wish you 'Good-morning!' ''

Dallas, as he reseated himself, perceived he still held the bill in his hand. He called his clerk.

''Return this London bill to Mr. Addison, to be passed through in the usual course.''

As he mechanically drew towards him the first papers that came to hand, he felt conscious, once more, of a haunting feeling that something was being concealed.

''Why should she have been so anxious to know the procedure adopted with regard to bills? Could she have had an inkling in her mind that the Bank intends to refuse the responsibility of holding bills after giving delivery of the goods? . . . It would have a serious effect were we to refuse delivery except for cash, and send her consignment to the auction-room. And Grace Dalrymple, being a new, unknown name, would naturally be one of the first to be so dealt with. . . . Suppose the manager were to require payment on delivery? . . .''

Dallas laid down his pen, and leant back in his chair in deep thought.

'' 'Not negotiated!' Ah, that accounts for her surprise. . . She understood at once that the Bank was not interested—well, not specially so—in obtaining assurance of payment. . . She is profoundly clever,'' he cogitated, . . . ''And yet she will pay within thirty days, and I fully believe her. . . No, there is some other reason . . .some other reason.''

Dallas resumed his pen with a sense of unrest. He did not understand, whereas he felt he ought to know of the whole matter. That is all.

''Mr. Dallas!'' He looked up, startled.

Miss Dalrymple had re-appeared at the door.

''I feel some constraint,'' she said, speaking in a suave tone which lent, at once, grace and dignity to her manner. ''I feel some constraint as to taking up so much of your time in the Bank with my affairs, which really only concern me personally, and

can have no other interest for you except such as yourself—a very valued friend—may be pleased to exhibit on my behalf. Perhaps, therefore, you may do me the honour of calling at the hotel—the Carlton Hotel—sometime in the evening, if you should happen to be quite at liberty?''

Dallas rose up the moment she spoke, but remained standing at the table.

The marked difference of his demeanour did not escape her notice, and a kindly entreaty of tone distinguished her last words.

What answer but one could he make to an invitation so graciously and frankly given!

She hardly thanked him by word—she suffered her glance to communicate their message.

''Will you come to dinner?'' she suddenly added. ''I dine always at the table d'hote—the hour is half-past six—this evening?''

The last two words were uttered half-questioningly, half-affirmatively. Never had her manner appeared so engaging, so attractive.

Dallas felt it difficult to remain altogether cool-headed. The rustle of her dress as she passed out at the door dwelt on his mind.

Throughout the day did his thoughts wander, assuming queerer shape than he, perhaps, cared to admit being conscious of. Who might this inexplicable woman be whose tastes, sentiments, even business-habits, coincided with his own, and yet whom he was bound to acknowledge as his superior in many respects in the very province in which he had earned his position.

She was profounder than himself; more intuitive, of quicker penetration, and keenly observant.

She assumed to herself with the ease of possession the very capabilities which the cultivated mind of man is able to command, and she added thereto the natural heritage and acquired accomplishments of a gifted woman.

Was it possible for Dallas to pit his strength,

capable of cutting in two the iron bar, against the skill of a scimitar which can lightly sever the silken cushion?

And her charm! Did she truly possess an influence impossible to resist?

CHAPTER VIII.

DALLAS DINES WITH MISS DALRYMPLE.

"Worship the gods as if they came,
And if you don't, it's all the same."
—Chinese Parody.

Glancing backward as he mentally recalled the many incidents already crowded into his short acquaintance with Miss Dalrymple, Dallas was fain to admit that there appeared no regular sequence of events. It was the unexpected which always happened. Every interview, every visit had disclosed some new purpose, some different transaction, rendering it impossible to frame an opinion as to the position, the intention, even the business of this new customer.

Whither would this apparent entanglement of affairs lead him, for, in spite of himself, he already began to feel as one drawn into a current?

The very mystery attached to the circumstances naturally fascinated him, apart from the still deeper element of romance which by reason of its very strangeness was likely to make all the greater impression.

Thoughtfully he passed the day, and leaving the Bank soon after five o'clock, walked homewards to change his dress.

The evenings were now beginning to lengthen, for the autumn had well advanced. As the sun set, a slight chill in the air became noticeable, but like most autumn sunsets in Australia, the evening was profoundly beautiful. Very clear was the atmosphere; the outline of the hills, the towers, steeples

and campaniles of the city being sharply traced against the sky. The heavens above were full of colour, the light clouds of evening being lit up with rich burning tints that shed a roseate glow upon the city and upon the water, while the sails of a brig which slowly drifted up the harbour, stood out upon the scene like a marvellous painting. Beyond the brig, the white walls of the lighthouse upon the far-off cliffs gleamed redly.

Dallas paused near Governor Bourke's statue, upon the rising ground of the Domain, and looked down upon one of the loveliest scenes of Sydney, aye, of the world. For more than an hour Dallas had been striving to give point to his thoughts, but they seemed to follow unbidden paths of their own. Yet he looked forward to this evening with a glad heart, believing the time had come when the reticence which had led to so much doubt would now give place to a confidence, a frankness, such as he hoped would enable him to prove himself of real worth and appreciation in the service of one whom he felt delighted to honour.

Passing through the Domain gates, Dallas proceeded leisurely towards Wemyss-street, and exactly at half-past six o'clock he ascended the steps, and entered the handsome hall of the Carlton Hotel.

As he deposited his hat and stick in the vestibule the dinner-gong sounded, and long before it ceased the guests of the hotel were to be seen making their way from various directions towards the wide doors of the dining-hall.

Dallas awaited Miss Dalrymple, whom he perceived descending the staircase. She greeted him with that charming frankness which ever left such pleasant impression upon the recipient.

"As punctual as I expected. Do you know," she continued, as they passed together towards the saloon, "I think it is strict punctuality on the part of men, which more than anything else begets a woman's confidence in them. She feels that if they

be true to time, they will be faithful in every other particular. . . . Now, our seats are on the other side of the table where I directed the waiter to reserve two for us."

The hall was nearly full, brilliantly lit, the long table flashing with polished glass and adorned with flowers, all the appointments being in keeping with the order observed in high-class hotels. The walls were divided architecturally into panels, each of which holding a large mirror, reflected the lights of the handsome chandeliers, and gave an unusual appearance of brilliancy.

"Not the least of the luxuries of the 'Carlton' are these excellent chairs," said Miss Dalrymple, as the waiter, slightly moving her seat, allowed her to draw to the table and sink into cushioned comfort. "It is an axiom of the house to make the dinner-hour the period of recreation for tired mortals,—for very many of these people," she whispered mysteriously, "are busy city men."

"Wealthy, as a matter of course," responded Dallas, glancing down the table.

"'Ce va sans dire.' They prefer hotel-life to that of a home—'a l'Americaine'—and I sympathise with them. . . I see our admirable 'chef' is still true to his reputation. He makes a point of never allowing us to recall when we may have tasted similarly-prepared soup. This is chestnut soup. You seem, in Australia, to have usurped everything belonging to our Europe, even chestnuts."

"No, not yet," said Dallas, laughingly, "for I must in all honesty admit I have not hitherto in Australia tasted chestnut soup. It is an English importation."

"There are some excellent stories current about our 'chef'; he is an artist after Vatel's own heart, and when he has surpassed himself in the preparation of some artistic conception—for he thinks the palate is the noblest part of man—he will follow his

'chef d'oeuvre' into the dining-hall, and if it is not eaten quickly whilst it is hot—just off the stove—or not properly appreciated—woe to Courvoisier, this Vatel of ours! It breaks his heart. He seizes his own two hands, seeking sympathy, as it were, and returns to his own dominions, ejaculating, 'Ah! ces Anglais, ces Anglais!' It is all he says, but the words express the measure of his contempt. . . . Monsieur will take ——. Mr. Dallas will also take wine," she said to the waiter who was in the act of filling her glass.

"Perhaps, though, you may prefer sherry to Madeira, but the latter is a taste I have found in my wanderings."

"No," answered Dallas, "I unhesitatingly approve whatever may bear the stamp of your favour. But, tell me, do you not secretly sympathise with your Vatel?"

"Most assuredly. I have several times talked with him. He is such an artist, and he verily believes me to be a confrere, if one may use the term —at all events, a compatriot."

"And he confides to you his—disapproval, shall we call it?—of Australian irreverence for his art?"

"Yes; it is his one theme, and he becomes so quaint, that my humour takes alarm, and compels me to flee."

Dallas noticed how the merry flash from her eyes lit up her countenance.

"I wonder, in that his sensitive soul should submit to incessant torture," quoth Dallas.

Miss Dalrymple's face changed with the swiftness of a flash.

"Because," she said, with steel-like distinctness, "'the jingle of the guinea heals the hurt that honour feels.'"

The sudden alteration in tone and manner startled Dallas; he at once comprehended that a hidden chord had been touched. It was his first insight to her inner self, and it told him nothing; instantly

her former manner re-asserted itself, but the actress-like expression and movement fascinated Dallas.

It happened that Black Duck was the course which succeeded the fish, permitting Miss Dalrymple to remark somewhat gaily, "Perhaps you might be interested to hear that Chef Courvoisier considers Wild Duck to be the only good that Australia can produce?"

"Oh, then, he is not such a bad fellow after all, for his liking in that respect awakes a kindred feeling. But in all seriousness, this duck is wondrously rendered."

"Yes, and it is a secret that will die with him." Then turning towards her guest, she continued, "I know that all men have a special predilection in the shape of wine, but I am about to ask you to allow the choice to be mine. There is a sparkling Moselle wine wafted hither by some happy chance, and but sufficient of itself to bear one in imagination to the land of 'Wine, Women, and Song,' as the poet hath been pleased to sing of it, and whence it hath come. Shall we then have our 'Brauneberg?'"

"You make me delighted with every opportunity of agreeing with you."

A minute later, the rich wine flowed in their glasses. The movement caused it to flash and sparkle in the gaslight, awaking irresistible desire.

Dallas thought it was easier to be stolid in the presence of the most exacting customer than before that glass of honest wine. With the delicacy of its bouquet, it appealed to all the nerve-centres of his system.

He turned to his hostess: "Is it to intuition or to experience that the perfection of knowledge and judgment has been thus given. It seems to me you are most happy in your life; an existence, one would think, enwoven with the beautiful—both artistic in its past surroundings, and wide in its sympathy. Surely such gifts, and so cultivated, must needs lead on to wondrous accomplishment?"

He spoke with such deep earnestness, and with such evident sincerity as to win, unseen by himself, a very kindly glance, but in the depths of that glance lingered an untold shadow, brought there by the words of a true heart's utterance. But rather irrelevantly she hastened to turn the current of his thoughts.

"I do not know," she said, "whether it be due to Continental training or not, but I certainly have a preference for residence in hotels. One is not so quiet, perhaps, but one is—well—more comfortable. You feel that you are waited upon, and that is hardly the characteristic you have become acquainted with in pensions, or lodging-houses, as we English love to term our temporary abiding places. The very name seems to breathe one's feelings towards them. Is it not so?"

And once more the merry eyes told only of the pleasure of the moment. Thus the dinner proceeded, his entertaining hostess leaving Dallas not a moment to himself. He had long ere this gathered that there could be but few countries, either in Europe or America that she had not visited, but whether on business or pleasure did not appear, and her being conversant with every topic and question of the day indicated that not only must she have been largely accustomed to Society—which he was able very easily to understand,—but also must be a persistent reader, even to the point of being a student. The extraordinary juxtaposition of accomplishments, taste, and refinement on the one hand, and his knowledge of her business occupation on the other, seemed to partake of the nature of a mystery. Had all this odd mixture presented itself in Europe, he would have been quite prepared to assume she was engaged in some wild political schemes such as exercise fascination for Celtic and Slav temperaments, but—in Australia—!

However, Dallas allowed no such thoughts to disturb him just now. Why should he? He was

the guest of a charming hostess, and it seemed to be equally delightful on her part to entertain a guest in whom she had become interested. And no other role perhaps fitted her so well, inasmuch as being gifted with somewhat of a bonhomie of manner, and an attentiveness that was always flattering to others, she never failed to draw forth all that was best in her companions. Knowing the art of conversation, she taught it unto others.

Can it be wondered at, therefore, that Dallas, after his intense enjoyment of the dinner hour, should question within himself as to his own prosaic manner of life being worth the living?

There was a pleasing restrained bustle, a general emanation of good humour and enjoyment pervading the room, that acted like a tonic upon tired nerves. Possibly, it was a fillip instead of rest to out-wearied feeling, yet, nevertheless, it brought with it a delight that was exhilarating.

"I suppose," said Dallas as they chatted about one thing and another, "it is our fault that Society with us has not the charm which is its attribute in Europe."

"In a general sense, there is undoubtedly a difference, due probably to the Australian being too intent upon material things, and consequently neglecting the soft nothings and airy trifles—nothing in themselves, and totally disregarded by matter-of-fact business people—but which have become an art in the intercourse of peoples in older countries. It is the poetical view by grown-up people of the part that is played by Ariel in our daily lives—an acknowledgment of the existence in a more matured state of those lightsome fairies in which in our childhood we were such devout believers. Possibly the influence of those early impressions still continue, except when driven out by the pressure of cruel hard work—and then, and then," she continued with a gracious inclination, "an hour like this may be trusted to restore the fairies' power. But Australia

seems to have inherited all of England's traditions, and we shall doubtless find in due course her Society modelled in the same fashion."

"And in the meantime?"

"And in the meantime, people must seek to imbibe something of the romantic feeling of Europe by doing as you have done—visit the Old World."

Dallas liked the archness of her manner."

"Miss Dalrymple," he remarked, as though addressing a third party, "might almost be credited with clairvoyancy by reason of the aptitude of the surmise."

"It is not guesswork," she said quietly. "I have learnt it from yourself; you allow your interest in places and things to be too manifest."

Dallas paused a moment. "Then, indeed, I hope I am able to preserve due reticence in business affairs, however unsuccessful I may be with social matters."

"And, indeed," answerd Miss Dalrymple, "do not be concerned on that account, for I can testify thereupon."

"I really believe," she continued, "that our Vatel must have had regard to-day to the honour of serving you, for he has prepared for your delectation his wonderful 'soufflee.' But I will not spoil the pleasure of anticipation by description—you must taste for yourself, and pronounce judgment—nor is delay permitted, for see it has come directly from the artist and his fire, and even while it is beside you, it seems to breathe itself away."

The trifle was light as air, delicate as foam.

"It is only taste," exclaimed Dallas, "it has no substance."

"Exactly," responded Miss Dalrymple, "it is but taste itself, in the poetry of form, but the skill required to give it form is born, not made."

The "soufflee" was the last course. As they finished their wine, and occasionally cracked a nut, the people one by one left the table.

Still they chatted.

"Now," said Miss Dalrymple, rising from the table, "I expect, like other men, you are longing for a smoke after dinner?"

"Yes," admitted Dallas, "more than usually so, for one has much to think about, a process that can only be properly accomplished with the assistance of the pipe."

"And am I not to be admitted to the counsels?" she queried archly.

"By all means," he returned, "as soon as the thoughts have taken to themselves definite form—a circumstance not latterly accomplished by the aid of such science as I may be master of."

"Perhaps, after all, you will seek the key from me." She paused as they reached the foot of the staircase, on either side of which stood a bronze figure holding a branch with seven lights.

Dallas omitted to reply. He was only conscious how radiantly handsome she looked in the full light that fell upon her.

There was a kindly expression in her eyes as she frankly returned his regard.

Then she said—

"The smoking room is, I believe, in the direction towards your left. I will await you to rejoin me upstairs in the drawing-room. Au revoir."

CHAPTER IX.

WAS SHE MARRIED?

"I may not sing to you or tell my love."
—Lewis Morris.

Dallas found a seat in a sheltered corner of the balcony opening out of the smoking room. One other man, also regardless of the chill night air, leaned against the heavy balustrade looking out upon the city. He, too, smoked in silence, not venturing upon a single remark. Through the windows could be seen the smoke-filled atmosphere, wreath after wreath seeming to add to the density of the mist within. A number of men were gathered there, all smoking, a few reading, some with chairs drawn near together, chatting in groups. Like a far-off sound, the noise of talking and laughter reached Dallas's ears—an incessant striking of matches, and the occasional clink of glasses as waiters appeared.

Unmindful of it all, Dallas's mind busied itself with recollections. He strove with deliberation to piece together all the circumstances, the impressions, the words, incidents, connected with his acquaintance with this charming stranger, which might throw some light upon her purpose—her object in coming to Australia. Every interview seemed to have revealed something anew to him, but without confirming any previously-formed conclusion. He admitted to himself being confronted with an enigma, and he felt certain it boded something evil to the Bank. But his thoughts traversed swiftly all the evidences of friendliness to himself, especially manifest this evening. How could he connect a

woman like unto this woman with nefarious intentions?

"There is something unnatural about her dealings, not about herself," he argued. "She is perfect. Can she be hynotised?"

He shook his head. She was too real—too strong for any nonsense of that kind. "Then, she said I might need to seek the key from her; so she admits to there being a mystery. . . Yet she does not seem to make any endeavour to mystify me. Every incident, even every utterance appears to have originated unpremeditatedly. . . . If only one but knew something more about her! . . . Upon my word, the whole affair smacks of a romance . . . romance . . can one conceive of romance troubling me!"

But romance or not, the cool, calm deliberation of the man had been profoundly affected, and the more he thought upon the matter the more unsatisfactory did its aspect appear.

With an impatient movement—as of one who essays to put aside a trouble—he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, replaced it in its case, and, passing through the smoking-room, made his way towards the drawing-room.

As he reached the gallery at the head of the staircase, a stream of light pouring through an open doorway led him to the drawing-room. Several people were present—some conversing, a quartette playing whist, two more engaged at chess, while the rest were reading. The piano stood open.

Miss Dalrymple was seated on a sofa in one of the bow-windows, a gas-bracket above throwing a full light upon her.

She laid aside her book with a smile, as Dallas approached.

"I fear you have but taken time for a cigarette," she remarked.

"Scotchmen do not smoke cigarettes," he answered, as possessing himself of a chair, he placed it near the sofa.

It seemed as though the next hour were about to be as delightful as the previous period.

As Dallas glanced around, he observed several of the people to be regarding them both. He turned towards his companion, who perfectly unconcerned had slightly moved in order to ensconce herself more comfortably in the bend of the sofa—a preparation, as it were, for a long "tete-a-tete."

Thus it occurred to Dallas, and he inwardly resolved there should be an exchange of perfect confidence. It was the one thing he felt sure of winning from a woman.

Suddenly, however, Miss Dalrymple, assuming a seriousness of tone, leaned towards him and spoke low.

"Referring to the matter of that London draft, I find I must endeavour to 'place' all the consignment in this city, afterwards there may be an attempt to dispose of the balance on best account. I cannot leave Sydney at the present time. I shall, therefore, accept the bill as soon as the 'Oruba' reaches port."

"Have you had time yet to fairly consider the whole risk, with the probability—from what you have told me—of there being a serious loss to meet?"

"Yes, but as I am not a free agent—in a sense, I can hardly now explain to you—it is difficult to decide upon an alternative. Further consignments from Lintott and Co. would be imperilled by hesitation as to acceptance, and perhaps better than any other London firm, they are in a position to anticipate requirements and send hither the class of goods I specially need. On the other hand, transactions with Duluth and Son form part of my obligation. I should dearly like to explain to you my whole position, but being intimately connected with others. I cannot speak of my affairs without also divulging theirs, and as, in that respect, they have still left me considerably in the dark, I do not know

to what extent there would be justification for me in submitting these matters for your opinion."

Dallas's eyes seemed to retreat inwards for a few moments, as he rapidly thought over all the circumstances attending his knowledge of her business.

Beneath her eye-lashes she studied the strong, cool face. Suddenly he looked up directly into her eyes. Her gaze met his for a moment, and then fell.

He said: "You are a lady, here alone, a stranger in a strange land, dependent upon your own resources, and probably your connections being the outcome merely of business dealings would only be concerned, as to your failure, to the extent to which their interests might be affected. In such circumstances, as you admit, it is undoubtedly difficult to decide rightly. But, I would remind you, you can command the friendly counsel of those who have spent all their business lives amid similar surroundings. The Bankers in this country never hesitate to give advice and information when asked for by a customer, and, moreover, you already know myself to be disinterested. Therefore, tell me all about yourself."

Again she looked into his face, earnestly, with something of a woman's trustfulness in her mien.

"I should like to do so," she said.

She laid her hand on his arm. "I never act hurriedly—I will think over the whole case, and when you come again I will know how much can be spoken of. But I wish," she said, with some slight hesitation, "I had met you earlier."

"But you have not long since arrived in Australia."

"I mean, before I entered into the arrangement that led to my coming to this country. Now, let us put an end to business; it is enough to give up the day without spoiling the evening also."

But Dallas deprecatingly raised his hand; he was anxious to continue the conversation which

could not but result in gleaning some light, while, at any moment, yielding to the usual feminine impulse, she might grant him her confidence.

Miss Dalrymple, however, rose as she spoke, and moved towards the piano. With slow reluctance Dallas accompanied her, and obeying a slight movement of the hand, as she seated herself upon the music stool, he inclined himself towards a low easy chair placed at the side of the piano.

As her hands touched the notes she paused, and turning half round towards the chess players, asked if she would be disturbing their game.

"Most certainly not," courteously responded the gentleman; "you will be affording us great pleasure."

Then she played with ready instinct, selecting music that pleased Dallas. Apparently forgetting his presence, she suffered herself to become absorbed in the harmony. Her eyes had the abstracted gaze of one who, forgetting passing things, dwells upon some inner thought, some dream, and suffered the expression to find vent in the cadence of the music.

As her fingers concluded the last notes, Dallas suddenly leaning forward, said, "Do you remember at the Jeromes,' you promised to sing to me?"

A slight colour mounted into her face. She bent her head before answering.

"Yes, alone perhaps, but not now."

Her hands fell from the notes, and she began talking to Dallas about ordinary topics, but conversed very gravely. There was a subdued quietness that appeared to him to be in marked contrast to all her other phases of humour. As though she had been communing with some fellow-spirit, there was noticeable a reserve into which Dallas felt he might not enter. Their minds had become divergent —they had passed out of each other's sphere of influence, and the conversation became almost desultory, until the departure of several occupants of

the room suggested to Dallas that it was also time for him to take his leave.

Miss Dalrymple made no effort to detain him longer.

"I am not very often 'at home,' Mr. Dallas, but if you choose to call, and take the chance of finding me within, I shall be always pleased to see you."

Dallas passed down the long, carpeted staircase, took his hat and stick from the stand, and thoughtfully made his way homeward.

Again had there seemed to have been created some new development. How was it possible for a man to preserve an unaffected temperament?

He had become conscious of a deep interest in, and concern for this woman who thus suddenly was forming part of his life. Who could she be to thus, so successfully, conceal the true knowledge of herself, her life, her character?

In which of all her moods was she the actress; in which her natural self? Was she in command of a business and controlling others, as her account seemed to prove? Or was she the agent of others, as her words appeared to show?

Had she a concealed past, and now a daring adventuress carrying out some bold scheme to which so many half-hidden circumstances seemed to give point? Or could she be the foil of others?—this woman, with her strong character—never! Was she the artist, purely and simply, in uncongenial surroundings and circumstances—as her evident tastes led the Jeromes and her friends to believe?

Unaffectedly, she had invited Dallas to the hotel, with the unconcerned air of a woman of society accustomed to issuing invitations to her home —like as would a married woman.

A married woman!

The thought struck cold to Dallas's heart. His chest swelled with a sudden deep, quick breath, and he strode out with a hastier step. With the blood racing through his veins, he passed out of the Do-

main gates, on past the wharves of Woolloomooloo Bay, up the long stairs into Victoria-street, and thence through Darlinghurst towards his rooms. With unquenched feelings he turned the latch-key, and entered his lodgings.

CHAPTER X.

COMRADESHIP.

There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple;
If the ill spirit has so fair a house,
Good things will strive to dwell with it.
—Shakespeare.

It may be assumed that Dallas is not the first man who, distraught with conflicting feelings, and a prey to imaginative doubts, misgivings, and uncertainties, has found out what curative properties exist in steady downright hard work, which, keeping the brain throughout the livelong day at high tension, leaves scant opportunity for the development of sentimentalism.

The work in the Bank, moreover, was daily becoming more exciting. The element of uncertainty was rampant, and city offices were seeking information from country branches as to the prospects and conditions of trade and industry; while country managers were looking to the city centres for guidance in their treatment of business. The feverishness of trade was becoming intensified; incessant sales trod upon each other's heels, yet everyone was exclaiming at the evidently inflated values that property was fetching. Certain people sold and placed the proceeds on fixed deposit with the Banks, while others were as eager to purchase.

Throughout all the time, the Head Offices of the Banks were seeking to keep down the valuations of securities, while the branch managers, on the other hand, appealed to the fact that property was

actually being sold, and realising to the full the valuations they had made.

As deposits continued to accumulate, so was there ever a steady demand for money. Trade was good, the productive industries healthy, and Banks received their interest. The country prospered.

If it were not for the pouring into the country of those enormous imports which the Banks were absolutely powerless to check!

Every London mail created consternation among the executives of the Banks.

"The country can't stand it—can't stand it!" said the manager one day to Dallas, as he lunched with him at his club.

"Of course, this balance of trade against us represents a piling-up of debt in one form or other, but I doubt much if more than a fair proportion will become a charge or burden upon us."

"Granted, but even allowing that some of this imported capital becomes permanently invested here, the interest will always need to be remitted to England."

"Even so, and England is welcome to her share of the profit. Every sum which comes to Australia must in a sense, either become directly productive, or else must supplant an equal sum of colonial money, and that sum in Australian hands will be applied to further development and production. The profits incidental to the working of such industries will remain here, England will only take, as it were, the surplus revenue that her capital has created, while Australia will be the richer to the extent of the working expenses expended in the carrying on of these industries."

"That is but one aspect of it. Our uneasiness is due to the fact which has come to our knowledge," and the Manager lowered his voice, "that vast sums, amounting to tens of millions, have been advanced to Australian companies in the form of loans, almost repayable on demand, as well as deben-

tures, while certain trading firms are becoming stocked as an outlet for English goods."

"Whew-w-w!" Dallas drew in his breath.

"If English capital," the Manager continued, "as in the old days, were to continue to be devoted to the formation of working companies, and the acquisition of revenue-producing properties, there would be absolutely nothing to dread. The field is vast, and its expansion apparently unlimited, but you understand the danger of Australian companies owing money, payable on demand, to a people thirteen thousand miles away. Blood may be thicker than water, but when money is at stake, cousinship falls to a discount."

"That partly accounts for the rapid increase of the deposits in some of the Banks," said Dallas.

"Yes, but for ourselves and several other Banks as well, we have held aloof from this danger. It is costing us, however, a considerable loss in our business, for we cannot see our way to make advances, such as other Banks are taking up."

"We can afford to lose, for our business constantly grows."

"So it should, but it is no satisfaction to find good customers prepared to put millstones about their necks, merely because other Banks offer them the means. Doubtless many of them will come to utter grief, from which they might be saved were they but to think it worth while to be guided by their old Bank, accept 'No' from it, and still remain its customers."

Having finished lunch they did not return together to the Bank, because Dallas, having some business to attend to, proceeded towards the Merchants' Bank. It being luncheon hour, the Chamber was deserted, or nearly so, and Dallas, standing at the counter of the Receiving Teller, took a pay-in slip and began to fill in the amount of a cheque he held in his hand, and which he wished to have passed to the credit of a certain account. While so engaged, a youth com-

ing up beside him, drew from his pocket a large number of cheques. The pay-in slip was already completed, and as the clerk—such he appeared to be—leisurely withdrew the pin that held the cheques together, and bending them outwards, smoothed them with his hand, Dallas's eye happened to fall on the name written in a large round hand on the slip—"Morier and Co." At the same instant his glance also comprehended that there were four figures in the pounds column—that the deposit, in fact, exceeded a thousand pounds.

Dallas passed his deposit across the counter to the teller, and having received his "duplicate," duly initialled, walked out of the Bank.

"A bran-new firm paying in more than a thousand pounds," he observed to himself, "and probably the same sort of thing happens every day, since people do not hold over large cheques until they accumulate."

"Psh! There is black dealing somewhere."

Dallas felt a desire to call again upon Miss Dalrymple, but an inner prompting told him his visit would be inopportune—at all events, so far as being of service might be concerned. It was now nearly a fortnight since the memorable evening he had spent at her hotel, but although they met almost daily, she had made no reference either to his visit or their conversation.

"She has the lead," he said to himself; "I must wait until she plays.

He was persuaded now that a drama was being played, and that, moreover, he would be called upon to take a part therein. And he was prepared to obey the call that right and duty should see fit to impose upon him. For himself he felt no concern, conscious of being "straight," and reliant upon his own strength and resource, he was ready against the time when the bolt should fall. And the chivalry of his nature told him he should stand by this woman.

The following morning at daybreak the "Oruba" arrived in port, and, reading the announcement in his newspaper, he gathered that a visit from Miss Dalrymple might be looked for.

The doors of the Bank had hardly opened ere she announced herself. The old "bonhomie" that Dallas loved so well appeared in her manner.

"It is the day for me to accept Lintott's draft," she declared, as though she were remarking she had called for a pleasant chat. With leisurely ease she sat down upon the chair, and proceeded to draw off her right-hand glove.

"I have never been able to accustom myself to write with gloves on my hands. My signature, then, appears to bear only a recognisable likeness, and probably bankers object to signatures that present but the ghost of their proper selves."

"I feel inclined to question spiritualism having ever attempted to invade a Bank," rejoined Dallas, "and there is something too real about a signature to an acceptance to admit of any ghost theory being raised."

"No, but perhaps the ghost may appear afterwards in the shape of Nemesis. Have you never known a spectre to be looming ahead pointing with unrelenting finger to the due date of the acceptance? No! Not to have known the mixed feelings attendant upon unliquidated acceptances! Ah! then one cannot look upon you in the light of a saviour—financially speaking, for being ignorant of such misfortune yourself, you will be unable to feel for others."

She laughed pleasantly, light-heartedly, and with such an unmistakable ring of fun in her voice that Dallas joined in, feeling something of a weight to have been removed from his mind.

This woman was true! So he reckoned. Meanwhile, Addison himself, in response to a message sent to him by Dallas, appeared with the bill. Perhaps he, too, felt some curiosity as to Miss Dalrymple and her transactions. He furtively watched

her, as having placed the acceptance on the blotting-pad before her, she took a pen from the stand. For a moment the pen remained poised as she glanced over the paper. Then, with deliberate movement, she turned the bill sideways and without hesitation wrote across its face the usual formula following upon the date:

"Accepted. Payable at the Bank of Australia, Sydney.
"GRACE DALRYMPLE."

"Thank you," said Addison, as he pressed the folded blotting-paper upon the ink. A quick, straight glance shot towards him. The impassive face betraying nothing, not even deigned to notice the regard. Apparently, however, the one searching look had satisfied Miss Dalrymple, who composedly leant backwards. Dallas could not determine whether or not the slight incident conveyed a meaning. Meanwhile, Addison was coolly unfolding some papers he held in his hands.

"You have advised the manager that Miss Dalrymple is accepting this London bill?" Dallas said, questioningly.

"Yes, sir," replied Addison, "and I am to deliver up documents on acceptance. These," he added, laying the papers on the table, "are the bill of lading, the invoice, a memo of charges, and the policy of insurance. They were attached to the bill, and are deliverable to yourself on acceptance."

Miss Dalrymple had taken up the papers, and with a quick glance scanned their contents. She made no remark until Addison having taken the completed acceptance, had gone out, closing the private door behind him.

She was in the act of replacing her glove, daintily smoothing back one finger after another, the while sitting back comfortably, when she remarked in a casual tone to Dallas—"I shall have good or bad news to tell you in a few days."

Dallas waited for her to raise her eyes. Per-

haps, he thought, he might glean a hint therefrom as to her meaning.

But the glove occupied her attention.

"Shall I call—then?" he enquired.

The scarcely perceptible movement of acquiescence betokened the sense of "comradeship" which had grown up between them.

While in the act of buttoning her glove, a gentleman appeared at the open door, but seeing a lady present, drew back.

"I see some one is waiting to speak to you. I must not incur his ill-will by trying his patience. Men put a great value upon their time during five hours of the day, and then unscrupulously waste ten. Good-bye."

"Good-bye!" responded Dallas.

The customer waiting without, perceived only the fixed face and unsmiling eyes of a woman on business matters intent.

But it had not seemed like a business interview to Dallas.

CHAPTER XI.

WOO'D, NOT WON.

"He is a fool who thinks by force or skill,
To turn the current of a woman's will."

—Sir Samuel Luke's "Adventures of Five Hours."

Towards the end of the week Dallas, who had now never absent from his mind the expectation of something "being about to happen," and was constantly on the watch for the next move, gathered the time had approached when Miss Dalrymple would be expecting him.

In the evening, immediately after dinner, Dallas therefore set out for the "Carlton," and as he proceeded along under the trees of the Domain, he could not avoid contrasting in his mind the confidence of feeling with which he traversed this same road on the occasion of his first visit to Miss Dalrymple, with the uncertainty of the present moment, and his powerlessness to control the circumstances in which she appeared to be enfolded.

There was evident, however, in the very straightness of his walk, a determination to arrive at the bottom of this mystery, or whatsoever it might be, and the set face indicated no possibility of going backward, or of being "put off"—he meant to see the matter through to its termination.

There was no pause in his walk to-night—on, on, he went with even step—through the gates and onward to Wemyss Street.

Entering the "Carlton," he left his hat and stick

in the vestibule, and ascended to the drawing-room unannounced.

Across the room he saw Miss Dalrymple seated in her favourite place beneath the gas-light. As the door opened she looked up.

He could not mistake the glad look with which she rose and welcomed him. It flattered the man and stirred into being a feeling to which his pulse had, hitherto, really been a stranger. There was trust, honesty, and candour in the firm, warm hand-clasp.

"Will you bring yourself a chair."

She had reseated herself, and Dallas, as though endeavouring to hide his quickened heart-beat, leisurely chose a chair and brought it to the side of the sofa.

"I can hardly call it an unexpected pleasure," she said, "for I have been expecting you to call, but all the same it is as pleasant as though unexpected. In truth, had you delayed ten minutes on the way, you would not have found me at home."

"But I beg you will not suffer me to interfere with your engagements, for I called merely on——"

She put up her hand.

"Do not concern yourself with trifles of that nature. I seldom permit myself to be specifically engaged. It seems to deprive life of—well—its Bohemianism—although, perhaps, such an admission would shock many of my hostesses. It is wonderful how often, even against their will, women are called upon to live a second part—their acquired training as it were. But to-night, I only intended to avail myself of a general invitation, and now it will be pleasanter to remain at home."

Dallas could only express his delight in being so highly honoured.

Then the talk subsided into more confidential tones, and presently a pause indicated that Dallas wished to be told some information without actually asking for it.

Understanding the implied desire, she began,

"You will be pleased to hear that to-day I succeeded not only in selling the last of Lintott's consignment, but also have secured orders for a large part of Duluth's."

With sympathetic touch he placed his hand on hers.

"I am more than pleased to hear so. I hope," he continued, "it has quite relieved you of all anxiety," laying a slight stress upon the word.

"Yes, quite so," she replied quickly. "Do you know when we become the prey of anxiety, we are apt to discover ourselves to be only women."

"And it was not intended, you find, for the softer sex to take upon themselves the speculative cares that worry the souls of men."

"It needs too much nerve," she assented. "But even if the second consignment should turn out as well as this one, I shall abandon all such transactions in future, unless——"

"Unless?" he suggested.

"I have your advice in its favour beforehand," she said, with an arch upliftng of her eye-brows.

"And constitute me your partner?"

"Yes," she said, simply.

Dallas glanced at her a moment before speaking.

"The Bank, hitherto, has usually provided me with all the care one needs to think about, so that there might be some fear of the onus falling upon yourself, as at present."

"But I should not mind so much."

"Can I hope, at all events, that you are now able to give me your confidence?"

"Not yet," she whispered.

Thus they talked,—almost unnoticed by the others in the room—in a fashion closely anear to lovemaking, without, perhaps, either of them being aware of the thin crust upon which they were treading.

They were "chums"—that is all.

But Dallas, as he walked home, seemed to have gained a lighter tread, and an elasticity of spirit which effectually dispelled the misgivings that had been accumulating during the past weeks. Yet he had felt older—not so very long ago.

The late tension of affairs seemed to grow easier, the London wheat market "firmed," and wool reports of late sales maintained their own. Accounts from the country districts, in all parts of Australia, spoke of good winter "feed," so that the prospect of the next wool clip was re-assuring.

As though to improve matters, a goldfield "broke out," creating, at once, an active new market, and a resort for all those who had failed elsewhere.

The commercial columns of the newspapers drew attention to the continuous improvement in trade, and money remaining abundant in the cities naturally led all classes to believe that only a normal state of things had existed throughout.

"The crisis has passed—for the present," remarked the Manager to Dallas.

"I suppose a good many of our customers consider we have been unnecessarily timid."

"They do not credit us with progressiveness," grimly responded the Manager.

Meanwhile Miss Dalrymple had retired Lintott's draft, and, as a matter of course, demanded rebate.

"It is an odd thing," she said, "that in business matters we should stand out for every concession, and yet unheedingly squander double the amount within the same hour."

The Bank yielded with its best grace.

The second consignment arrived, and now Dallas's attention being called to the matter, found occasion, every day, to look up the account in the ledger. The balance was mounting up into several thousands of pounds!

He became profoundly puzzled, for he doubted if she could be selling for "spot cash."

One morning a letter came to hand from Miss Dalrymple, enclosing a cheque for £3000, drawn upon her account, and desiring that the sum might be cabled to London for credit of Messrs. Lintott and Co.

Dallas pondered over the letter. He recollected her having said she would not venture upon another risk without first taking his advice. Suddenly the thought occurred, "The money is not her own."

He dropped his pen and sat bolt upright. The bare idea opened up such vistas of possibilities as to what the outcome might be, that Dallas, agitated, left his chair, and taking his hat, abruptly walked out of the Bank.

"Something unusual has occurred, and this it must be which accounts for my not having seen her for so many days. She has avoided me."

In half an hour Dallas returned, and with the lines of his face deepened, resumed his work.

Despite himself, his thoughts resorted to the absorbing topic that refused to be silenced.

"Could these moneys be the result of transactions with Morier and Co.?"

His instinct seemed to have distrusted that firm, even before he had obtained any knowledge of them, when he first noticed their cheques on her deposit slips. He recollected, too, her alarm when he proposed to enquire into their antecedents; her anxiety that Lintott and Co. should not know of her connection with Duluth and Son; her being restrained from confiding in him.

Could she be a confederate of a doubtful firm? And he loved her!

There could be no hiding of the fact. He admitted it to himself.

"Well," he said decisively. "I must know all—to the very bottom."

It was a restless day with him, waiting, waiting, for the evening, but it came at last, and after dinner

he set out upon what he determined should be a momentous visit.

The hour being somewhat early, he strolled slowly along, and entering the lower gates of the Domain, took a somewhat circuitous direction, in order the more clearly to arrange his thoughts in proper sequence, and to understand definitely the actual questions upon which he vowed to satisfy his doubts.

But the calm smoke in the quiet evening—too still to be cold—failed to soothe the turmoil of his heart. With the headstrong impetuosity of a man bent upon having his way, he turned towards the city, and once again he shortly found himself mounting the staircase leading to the drawing-room of the "Carlton."

His footsteps made no sound on the thick carpet, the door was half opened, and again in the familiar seat he perceived Miss Dalrymple.

There were but two or three others present.

As he appeared on the threshold, she glanced towards him with a start.

Dallas was narrowly watching every sign, every movement.

There was unmistakably a look of pleasure in her face, but although she arose from the sofa, yet he noted she did not spontaneously come forward to greet him, as on the previous occasion, and by the time he had reached her side, the soft slight flush had faded away.

The sudden glad smile he had grown to love so well, lit up her eyes.

"She is prepared for me," he thought.

There was no reference to his unexpected coming, but easily she spoke of one matter after another, none, however, possessing any special interest for either of them.

Dallas had come with a particular object in view—but knowing the only way for full information being revealed by a lady, to be through her own

free volition—he patiently waited, and chatted happily, as though he enjoyed the passing hour—as, perhaps, he did.

As they talked together, Dallas was rather pleased to observe that the other guests in the room one by one rose up to depart, eventually leaving him alone with Miss Dalrymple.

He was more than usually urbane, and once, when unconcernedly replying, he glanced up suddenly, and discovered her eyes to be studying him with terrible earnestness.

"Ah! there is something wrong," he thought. "She seeks to divine how much I may happen to know." Presently he became aware that he was directing the course of the conversation, and that his companion was complacently and agreeably following his lead—waiting, in fact, for him to declare his hand. He perceived also that he would need to be sufficiently communicative in order to elicit a response, and was equally conscious he must not hopelessly ruin himself in her opinion by advancing too far.

Under his guidance, therefore, the topics changed from light to grave, and they drifted into a drear discussion of commercial subjects.

"It appears as though the financial authorities were wide in their judgment when they opined a crisis to be at hand," said Miss Dalrymple, with a tinge of sarcasm.

"Perhaps so, but these critical periods often recur, more frequently, in fact, than the general public appear to believe. At such times it needs, perhaps, but one sensational failure of a large house or institution, and then, no one can foresee the end. When, of course, the crisis passes without any failure taking place, people, possibly, consider money to have passed through one of its customary 'tight' phases."

"But 'tightness of money' is a peculiarity with

the merchant, is it not?" She still spoke in a sarcastic vein.

"That depends in all probability," Dallas replied, slightly lifting himself, "upon whether he uses his own money which he has had first of all to earn, or whether he handles some one else's, for such money would be always cheap to him."

She calmly looked down; he half feared she might wince at the allusion.

"What difference should it make," she said indifferently, "in any case, should there be a loss he must pay."

"Circumstances may render it impossible to pay."

"Then he cannot, of course, atone," observed Miss Dalrymple.

"The other party who trusts and suffers does not think so."

"It is the risk of business."

"The law itself draws the line at fair and proper risk; if overstepped—imprisonment results."

Her book, lying open on the sofa, slipped off and fell on the floor, face downwards.

"Allow me to come to the rescue," he said with quiet deliberation, and then stooping forward, he picked up the volume.

Miss Dalrymple unconcernedly thanked him and continued:

"I suppose, in the Banks, you have very full opportunities of discovering the trading characteristics of customers?"

"Yes, and it occasionally happens that we alight upon some which cannot be accounted for."

"And then, is it the practice to request, or desire a discontinuance of the account?"

"By no means," curtly answered Dallas, somewhat nettled at her caustic words, uttered, however, with perfect propriety of tone and manner. He felt the veiled pin-pricks.

"Do not Banks esteem it worth consideration

to exclude themselves from abetting—inconsistencies?''

A very slight flush mounted to Dallas's forehead.

''Sometimes,'' he said, ''it may happen that but one officer perceives the slipping away. Were each official to assume the responsibility of his various inferences, chaos would result.''

''It is very interesting,'' she said, suppressing an incipient yawn; ''but is it not—shall we say—small?''

''It is interesting,'' he exclaimed vehemently, ''vitally interesting.''

Miss Dalrymple appeared to be amazed. As for Dallas, he had lost his habitual coolness; her consummate nonchalance and ''nerve'' having unsettled him. He had now no doubt of there being something wrong, and he also plainly perceived she had no intention of enlightening him. But he felt such confidence in her integrity of motive that he could only believe her to be the victim of the machinations of others.

The feeling of loyalty to this woman was uppermost in his mind.

''Miss Dalrymple,'' he began, with a slight tremor in his voice, ''when I had last the pleasure of being here, you were good enough to flatter our friendship with a promise of further confidence, admitting, however at the time, that you were delicately placed in business matters. I came here tonight, expressly to ask if you would fully trust me.''

''I do trust you absolutely. I had fully imagined that such was quite evident to you. Confidence in yourself was established at our first interview.''

''Then you can quite understand that I am also anxious to prove myself able to be of service.''

''I thank you, Mr. Dallas, but at the same time I sincerely hope it may not be necessary to test your kindness.''

"Forgive me for asking the question, but has not such time arrived?"

A swift glance escaped her.

"I fear I cannot concur with you, speaking merely from my own judgment of matters."

"You will not, I hope, consider me persistent in my asking if the connection with others, to which you have already referred, has tended to form your decision?"

A passing shadow on the face indicated some slight annoyance.

"I fear you must accept my reply as ending the matter, for upon such question I have no right to speak."

Dallas remained silent.

Miss Dalrymple was about to speak changing the subject, when Dallas motioned with his hand. Presently she evidenced some anxiety of expression, as, observing him to half-turn round to note if any one had entered the room, she instantly divined he had an important disclosure to make.

The slight tightening of the lips indicated that the woman's instinct of "fence" was ready to battle.

"Miss Dalrymple," he said, with a gravity of unbending determination, "it may be that my inferences are totally wrong, but at all events I have formed the impression that serious consequences may be averted if you will elect to confirm, or otherwise, certain conclusions which I have drawn?"

"Please do not speak further about business topics; I have already said I have no right to divulge matters which concern others."

"But if I give you the right?"

"How can you do so?" she said, speaking with some impatience.

Then Dallas said deliberately:

"By asking you to honour me by promising to become my wife."

Miss Dalrymple violently started, half rose from her seat, then sank down again. She looked straight across the room, while Dallas perceived from the twitching of her hands—their clasping and unclasping—how deeply she was moved.

Her lips quivered, while Dallas's own breath became quick in his restrained excitement.

Still she made no reply.

Dallas spoke again, but she only moved uneasily in her seat.

At length she said, speaking as it were with difficulty:

"I thank you for the honour—perhaps the greatest honour a man can evidence towards a woman—but it is impossible, quite impossible."

"How so?" he exclaimed, hardly able to prevent a passion of words from bursting forth.

"I cannot explain."

"I would like you to explain."

"No, I cannot—marry—you."

Dallas, unable to remain still, rose up from his seat, and paced across the room until he seemed to have recovered his self-control. Then, standing near to her, he said, "I think I have loved you from our first meeting, but, perhaps, did not realise the fulness or strength of the feeling until to-day. Men with natures like mine do not lightly take up love, and lightly lay it down. Nothing else but your promise will now content me."

"I cannot—cannot promise."

"It is owing, then, to this pitiful mystery which you persist in concealing from me—as if it could be worth a moment's consideration. A few weeks ago you would have given me the promise I now ask for."

"You have no grounds for such an assertion," she said, laying stress upon the words.

"Would you not have done so?" he asked, bending down and laying his hand upon hers.

Once more the swift glance flew towards him,

but immediately the expression of the face grew rigid.

"Ah! I see," he said, "you are steeling your very heart against me. This cursed trouble," he continued; "I know, I know I could save you."

But she ventured no reply.

"You have never married?" he queried abruptly.

"No," she exclaimed, with a ring of scorn in her voice.

"Nor loved?"

Her expression assured him.

"What, then, comes between us?" he demanded. "Tell me," he continued, in a tone that drew forth reply.

"Something," she admitted, speaking slowly, "that cannot now be forgotten—that cannot be wiped out. It will always, always be between us—— so that I can never become your wife. Please do as I wish, make no allusion to this subject ever again. Let us remain the good friends—warm and appreciative—that we have been."

"Nothing of the kind," rejoined Dallas curtly. "Unless I be permitted to judge for myself as to this vague something you speak of, I will not believe in its existence."

Her face had become troubled; the man's strong mind and nature affected her.

The downcast look awoke a sudden fear.

"It is not," he said, speaking thickly, "it is not—that—in the past, you—you——" he could not frame the dread into words.

"No, no, not that, not that, oh, no," she exclaimed, at once divining the unexpressed thought.

"I am content," he said quietly; "I will wait until I win you."

It was impossible for her not to feel touched by the evidence of strong devotion. She dared not look up.

Presently she said, "Will you go now; I feel

very deeply the pain I have caused you; I cannot bear more; I shall break down."

"Yes," he responded promptly to her pleading.

She arose, and accompanied him towards the door. He stopped, and said,

"I suppose I may continue to come here to see you?"

"Yes," she answered simply, standing beside him.

Ah, Dallas! why did you not dare all, take the woman in your arms and kiss her as a man kisses in the fierceness of his love!

A minute or two later, she heard the rattle of his walking-stick as he removed it from the hall-stand, the firm tread echoing on the tesselated pavement, and the faint click as he passed down the outer steps into the street.

Grace Dalrymple went to her room and communed with her soul—as only women know.

CHAPTER XII.

THE KEY TO THE MYSTERY.

"Have a care that your bills be not stolen."

—"Much Ado About Nothing."

The following day Dallas admitted to the accountant, in answer to his enquiry, that the strain of work was beginning to affect his health.

"But you seem to have aged ten years during the last month or two," continued the accountant.

"I will endeavour presently to arrange for a fortnight's furlough, and take a sea-trip. It is all that will be needed."

The accountant passed on, shaking his head. "Men always seem to select an inopportune time for laying-up in dock," he muttered to himself. "Just now it will be difficult to spare Dallas."

Dallas had good reason to appear ill; he had never hitherto known a single night to compress so much chagrin, dread and worry into its short hours.

Still determined to solve the mystery that enshrouded the woman he had learned to love, Dallas proceeded to sagaciously piece together every circumstance that day by day became revealed.

Miss Dalrymple's banking account amazed him to a painful degree. Even the ledger-keeper was surprised, and one day, as Dallas was inspecting the entries, he remarked:

"Miss Dalrymple appears to be making money."

"Yes, she must have acquired a large and valuable connection. . . I suppose all the entries are

genuine; you have noticed no indications of cross-firing?" continued Dallas questioningly.

"None whatever, sir. She pays away only small local cheques, besides these remittances to London, while her deposits include cheques of well-known firms. Certainly she has transactions with a large number of people, many of whom are quite unknown to me, but they pay cash and their cheques are never returned unpaid."

"Who is her largest customer?"

"Morier and Co."

"Considerably the largest?"

"Yes, sir; almost as large as all the others together—at least, I think so."

"Who are Morier and Co? Of what nature is their business?"

"They are indenting agents."

"Have they no warehouse?"

"I do not know of their having a store. I believe they are a firm who cable to London orders for new fashions and millinery goods, and place them, before arrival, at the best price obtainable."

The sub-accountant returned to his office, closed the door and reflected.

"If I were to communicate my doubts to the manager, and he should consider there were reasonable grounds for suspicion of fraud being carried on, he might probably desire the account to be closed, and then—?"

No, the Bank was incurring no risk, the account was profitable, and a large balance usually maintained. It would be time enough to move when the inevitable overdraft should be sought. Better, therefore, for the present, to wait and watch events.

The following day another large sum was cabled to London, and a few days later a still larger amount.

Almost every day Dallas managed to see Miss Dalrymple. She always evinced the same pleasure

at meeting him, but never referred to business matters. Should the conversation ever happen to tend in such direction, she would deftly change the subject. And Dallas was equally wise in carefully refraining from touching upon his unfortunate passion. This he nursed in grim silence, and so long as he observed the "convenances," she appeared to be indifferent as to whether his love towards her waxed or waned.

A few more days passed, and another considerable remittance was cabled—two thousand pounds.

Every transaction tended to trouble Dallas yet more.

There appeared to be no finality, no lessening, but a terrible increase.

He felt a crisis to be near. Uneasiness took possession of him.

In the afternoon, as he was sauntering homeward along King-street, and into Pitt-street, he overtook Miss Dalrymple. She had finished her "shopping," she said, and so they passed along away from the crowded streets into the comparative quiet of Market-street, and thence through Hyde Park. Issuing again from the Park by the gates near the statues of Prince Consort and the Queen, they proceeded along Macquarie-street, and when, at length, they parted at the steps of the Carlton Hotel, she said:

"You might call here to-morrow evening—it will be my last in this city for some time. I am about to leave Sydney. Good-bye."

Without waiting for his reply, she ascended the steps, and entered the hotel.

"The expected has come at last," thought Dallas, as he walked home. "She departs, and leaves behind a legacy of doubt, mystery, and—possibly—wrong-doing, for us to unravel and apportion. . . . Heigho! so this is to be the end of one's infatuation. . . . Infatuation! Well. so it is."

Meditatively, he sauntered along.

"And yet I trust her absolutely, for I believe her to be entirely honourable, in spite of appearances. . . . One more interview of two hours wherein to win her, or lose her—for ever! . . . If she should leave this city, it will be through some force or influence considerably greater than mine. Of that I am convinced. . . . Yet she loves me—I am sure of it. . . . One more try. . . . Dallas, Dallas, has one of your kith ever owned defeat, even by a woman!"

He pulled himself together, squared his shoulders after his old habit, and walked briskly along.

From the set lips and confident bearing, it was evident that to-morrow all her woman's wit would be needed to match itself against a strong man's determination.

During the evening Dallas essayed to read, but the picture before his mind of the face he loved, with its expression varying with her ever-changing mood, drove away all other consideration. At length he retired, and in the morning woke up, astonished at an unbroken night's sleep having once more come to his tired brain.

As he entered the office, not long afterward, it might have been noticed that the worn look resulting from anxiety of thought by day and night, had now given place to the easy assured expression of countenance which had always distinguished him.

He felt restored to himself again.

This day was the fourth of the month, and Dallas's attention was early drawn to the ledgers, where he was engaged in authorising the payment of bills and in conferring with the manager in certain cases where he did not care to accept the sole responsibility. In due course he came to ledger-keeper "D" who, among the batch of bills laid aside to await the sub-accountant's decision, had included one signed by Grace Dalrymple for £121 3s. 9d. Despite his self-control, Dallas started.

"This is another new phase," he thought. He

first of all dealt with the other bills referred to him, and then directed Miss Dalrymple's account to be shown him.

The balance was £103 7s. 2d.

"I suppose it is quite right," said the ledger-keeper, "because she pays in large sums every day," and his finger ran up the column showing the deposits.

"Is this the only bill?" the sub-accountant asked. "Ascertain just before the 'exchanges' are cleared, if she shall have paid-in, and also if there be any other bills or cheques; then let me know."

"Yes, sir."

"In the meantime, charge nothing to the account."

"Very well, sir."

Passing on to the next ledger, the sub-accountant appeared to have forgotten everything else, save the particular subject then in hand.

Having dealt with all the "first exchange" delivered by the other Banks, he returned to his office, whither he was shortly followed by ledger-keeper "D."

"You directed me to advise you, should Miss Dalrymple pay-in."

"Yes, has she done so?"

"Here is her pay-in slip for £150 3s. 6d., and here also three—four—cheques," turning them over in his hand, "aggregating about £230. If the cheques be paid, there will be only a balance of £23 left wherewith to meet this bill for £121."

"You may leave all the documents with me, and I will look into the matter. Delay answering the 'exchanges' concerned, until I shall have finished."

"There is still a quarter of an hour, sir."

"Very well."

As the ledger-keeper left the room, Dallas perused the list of cheques detailed on the back of the pay-in slip, and then entering the Outward Ex-

change Department, he narrowly inspected each cheque in turn before it should be despatched through the exchanges to the Bank upon which it was drawn. There were seven or eight cheques altogether, but they were unmistakably genuine "trade cheques" obtained from well-known retail houses, and evidently for goods purchased.

Feeling considerably relieved in mind, Dallas returned to his office, and examined the cheques bearing Grace Dalrymple's signature. One for £200 had been cashed at the counter, and showed £100 to have been paid in five twenty pound-notes, and £100 in gold.

"Her travelling expenses," he surmised. "It is a rather large sum to carry with her; she takes no draft."

The other three cheques were unimportant, being evidently given in payment of outstanding accounts.

"Apparently this bill has been quite overlooked," he cogitated, as holding it with both hands he closely examined it in every particular. It was, however, perfectly in order.

"In favour of Morris and Conway. Who may they happen to be?"

Moving across to his desk, he referred to his Directory which stood on the raised bookshelf. He glanced quickly down the names of Morris, and then slowly ran his finger down the page over the names. There was no mention of any such firm!

"The signature is certainly correct." He pondered deeply for some moments.

"This is doubtless the key to the mystery; it will not be wise to pay the bill, the more particularly so, as she is about to leave Sydney."

Returning the cheques and bill to the ledger-keeper, he said,

"Pay these cheques, but not the bill; return this

to the Austral Bank with answer, 'Awaiting advice, present again to-morrow.' "

Two minutes later, Dallas was driving in a cab to the Carlton Hotel.

"Is Miss Dalrymple at home?"

"No, sir," responded the porter, "she went out nearly an hour ago, and left word she would not return until this evening."

"Should she happen by chance to come in, would you be good enough to request her to call at the Bank of Australia?"

"I will, sir."

"Say that Mr. Dallas called."

"Mr. Dallas, yes, sir."

Re-entering the cab, he drove back to the Bank

CHAPTER XIII.

"GO, NOW . . . . GO!"

"As soon as women become ours, we are no longer theirs."

—Montaigne.

The day passed, but Miss Dalrymple did not appear at the Bank.

At the sound of every footstep near the door, Dallas looked up expectantly.

It was nearly six o'clock when the sub-accountant, having check-locked the tellers' safes, returned to his office to collect his books and papers which he always put away in his own safe.

Then he hastened home to dinner, and afterwards, having changed his dress, he hurried from the house.

Hailing a passing hansom, he drove to Wemyss-street. As he dismissed the cab, he stood a few moments on the pavement, then, replacing his pipe in its case, he ascended the steps of the hotel.

Haste had changed to deliberation. The consciousness of how much depended upon the next hour filled him with a sense of grave responsibility. He entered the drawing-room and, as he expected, beheld Miss Dalrymple occupying the same sofa-seat. Perhaps it was owing to her dress or something in the graciousness of her mien that made Dallas think he had never beheld her so charming.

She rose to welcome him, her eyes bright with a gladsome smile. But the smile faded away, as she perceived the expression of his face.

"What has happened?" she whispered, "for the porter told me you called to-day."

She waited in strained suspense, while he slowly turned to notice if any one should be observing them and likely to overhear their words.

"Yes," he answered with the same slowness; "an unfortunate business matter occurred which needed to be promptly attended to, and, therefore, I ventured to call for the necessary instructions, but regretted to find you were not at home."

Her attitude told of impatient expectancy.

"Perhaps there is another sitting-room where we could speak together?" he said.

"Yes, come with me."

"Now," she said, as Dallas closed the door of her own private sitting-room, "what have you to tell me?"

But Dallas considered the time for haste to have passed. He placed a chair for her near the fireplace, which contained the embers of a fire, and, leaning one elbow upon the end of the mantel-piece, he began:

"To-day, was presented, signed by yourself, a promissory-note which it was not intended should fall due—not just yet."

There was a slight movement of the mouth, but she preserved perfect composure.

"Quite so—there must have been a mistake, the bill should not mature for another month."

"When you would have been away?" he questioned.

"Possibly."

"But it is necessary to meet the amount, and you are about to leave Sydney."

"You might please tell me the amount, so that to-morrow I may put the account in funds?"

"One hundred and twenty pounds; but I ought to mention the bill has been returned unpaid."

"You do not mean to say it has been dis-

honoured!" Starting from her chair, she turned upon him with a fierce gesture.

"There was no alternative. I was unable to assure the Bank as to its correctness."

She took a few short, quick steps across the room, and returning, stood in front of Dallas.

"Do you consider me to be a woman who could not be trusted in a matter so important?"

"I have already shown my trust in you," said Dallas gravely; "the failure is, you could not trust me."

There was again an impatient movement as she flashed upon him imperiously.

"Tell me the reason of my bill having been dishonoured; the assumption must be a self-evident error."

"In the circumstances, I do not consider myself to be in a position to disclose any reason," replied Dallas coldly.

"But you have acted upon mere supposition," she persisted. "Could you not see there must have been some mistake, in all probability in the date?"

"I did see."

"Why, then, did you not take some step to protect me?" she exclaimed almost fiercely.

"Because that bill," said Dallas, with calm deliberation, "has furnished the key to the mystery."

"Nonsense," she contemptuously interjected; "how can there be a mystery in a mere mistake in the date?"

Dallas felt taken aback. It began to dawn upon him that, after all, through not understanding everything, he had permitted some mad suspicion to run riot in his brain.

Her foot impatiently tapped the floor.

But, cautious to the last, Dallas, speaking slowly, as though seeking in the recesses of his mind for some inspiration, said,

"But another matter has also been disclosed."

There was, perhaps, a slight stagger, as though her body swayed; yet Dallas seemed to take notice.

"Well!" she queried, almost scornfully, "what may now have been discovered?"

"I prefer that you should tell me," coolly answered Dallas.

"Tell you!" she repeated in her half-contemptuous manner; "how can I tell you?"

"Do you not see how seriously you become compromised?"

"Compromised! How? I shall be glad if you will be good enough to explain what you mean," she continued, with restrained anger ominously ringing in her tones. "Compromised! because I made some mistake in the date of a bill and, consequently failed to provide for it."

It was Dallas's turn to be thrown upon his guard. He felt himself to be no match in a contest with a woman's trained intelligence. Of what use would it be to lay open to her the series of inferences and conclusions which had made it appear evident to him that consciously or otherwise, she had been involved in some huge fraud?

He was silent for a few moments, a glimmering of what a woman's scorn might prove to be like obtruded itself before his mind. Still, he owned to himself that he loved her none the less, as he looked upon her standing before him, erect of form, with flushed cheeks, and the deep eyes ready to flash—a woman magnificent in her roused spirit.

He replied: "You may remember my desiring you to confide absolutely in me. At that time, I declared I would save you from trouble which something more than experience told me to be impending. In fact, apart from this, the mere circumstance of your withholding all knowledge from me as to your connections would have furnished evidence sufficient of itself. But I studied much more deeply,

and learnt to know with every fibre of my being that you were perfect in honour. A man, however, does not lightly give his love or his trust. Above all, he is loyal to a woman to whom he has pledged himself. His very first duty, perhaps, is due to her. At all events, so I feel, and now I have come to you expecting the same loyalty in return."

"Mr. Dallas," she said, speaking decisively and clearly, "you were good enough to honour me with the highest expression of feeling possible to a gentleman, but you forget I was compelled to decline its acceptance for reasons too intricate to state, and, therefore, I am committing no wrong in esteeming it my duty not to divulge matters concerning other people with whom you have no connection."

Dallas listened with grave face. This brushing aside, as it were, of all personal consideration, both hurt and offended the man's pride.

"That remains a point, perhaps, which might be made clear." There was acerbity in the tone.

"The bill in question," she explained, "belongs to another party, and has nothing whatsoever to do with your Bank."

"On the contrary, I fear it concerns the Bank so intimately that a sense of imperative duty will require me to disclose to-morrow to my superiors such information as, indirectly, will render it impossible for you to leave Sydney until the matter is cleared up."

"What utter nonsense! The bill will be paid the first thing to-morrow morning, and there will be the end of the whole affair."

Dallas looked down with a feeling akin to despair. Nothing seemed to remove the insuperable barrier between them. He loved the woman for her womanly beauty, her mental power, her strength of intelligence, her nerve and firm will, and yet he felt unless he could now conquer that determination on

her part—now, before he left the room—that he should lose her, once and for ever.

Suddenly an inspiration struck him.

"But the other bills!" He uttered the words in a deep whisper with searching intensity. The unexpected shaft struck home. Her hands met in an involuntary movement. Possibly it was the tone rather than the words which conveyed to her a sense of hidden danger.

Presently she replied: "You need not be troubled; I have already said your Bank is not concerned."

"I have taken every care on that score," answered Dallas.

"You have taken care!" exclaimed Miss Dalrymple with scorn in her voice. "To-morrow, perhaps, you may learn of what value your care has been."

The haunting dread that had been pursuing Dallas against his will, now took definite shape. He suddenly felt fear. In the agony of his dread, he lost his self-control, and burst forth,

"Good heavens! Is it possible I have loved a swindler?"

"Mr. Dallas, how can you use such words to me?"

"Do not say more," interrupted Dallas, "this matter shall be placed to-morrow in the proper hands."

Rightly or wrongly, he had decided upon a step that induced consideration.

The anger due to outraged feeling suddenly subdued itself, as her quick mind comprehended the full importance of his proposed course of action. In tones which told how deeply she was stirred, and how strong was the effort to preserve composure, Miss Dalrymple, overlooking his previous outburst, proceeded:

"You are quite at liberty to use the confidence

I have placed in you, for any purpose which may appear to coincide with your sense of duty. I presume, however, you are aware of the position in which you would place me."

The raillery of her words stung him.

"I am aware," he retorted, "that this bill matured to-day instead of the fourth of next month, in company with all the other bills. By such time you would have been safe in Europe."

He waited for her reply; she made none. Dallas knew his surmise to be correct.

"But Morris and Conway," he went on to say, will now be able to take instant action."

"Morris and Conway?" she asked, "what have they to do with it?"

Dallas's first impression was that Miss Dalrymple was preparing to fence the question, but regarding her attentively, he saw she was speaking truly.

"Tell me," he said, impulsively, "to whom did you give the bills?"

She perceived he did not know. Complacency returned to her, and she took a deep breath. She had ascertained the full measure of the information he possessed, and it amounted to—nothing.

"It is certainly not for me to state, if information which I may give is likely to be applied to unknown purposes."

Utterly downcast at the hopelessness of winning or even bending this woman, Dallas gazed blankly before him.

Then in a flash of thought he exclaimed:

"Grace, did you give all the bills to Morier and Co.; if so, there has been a hideous piece of treachery, of which you know nothing. Trust me, Grace, trust me!"

She looked up sharply, having already grasped his meaning, and her face, for the first time, assumed a look of doubt and fear.

"Yes," she uttered hoarsely, "all."

"And you are sure you have given bills to no other parties?"

"No, only to Morier and Co."

"Do the bills aggregate a large sum?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

She hesitated a moment, and then said,

"Between five and six thousand pounds."

"Sh, shush!" exclaimed Dallas, grinding his heel into the hearth-rug.

"Forgive my words to you, Grace. I have been almost out of my mind. But the whole scheme is clear to me now. . . Had you but told me sooner!"

There was silence.

Dallas moved about the room restlessly. He felt that nothing could be done to avert the impending disaster. It was beyond his power to protect her. She could, perhaps, save herself by instant flight—but her name, her honour! Miss Dalrymple had sunk exhausted into a chair.

"When I told you, I loved you—you knew of all this?" queried Dallas, stopping before her.

Her head inclined faintly in response.

"And your life might have been so full, so happy with me," he said half bitterly.

She stopped him with a gesture.

"I cannot think now," he said, "of what may be best to do. I will come again to-morrow."

Mechanically he moved towards the door.

"No, you must come again no more," said Miss Dalrymple, rousing herself.

She rose up and, overtaking him, laid her hand on his arm.

"Oh, yes," he replied somewhat wearily; "I will come again."

He had reached the door, and having turned the handle, held the door half-open.

"Keith," she whispered, "good-bye!"

Slowly he turned towards her.

"Good-b—"

With passionate impulse, she threw her arms around his neck, and drawing his head towards her, pressed her lips to his in a deep, long, fierce kiss.

"Go, now," she said, "go."

She thrust him from her, and closed the door between them.

A few moments later, one of the guests in the hotel, detecting the sound of uneven steps coming heavily along the corridor, hastily entered a room, and locked the door.

As Dallas passed down into the street, the porter looked out from his room at the swaying figure which seemed to stumble on every step. "My lady has given him the send-off, methinks."

CHAPTER XIV.

FACE TO FACE WITH MORIER ET CIE.

"This is no time to lend money, especially on base friendship, without security."

—Timon of Athens.

On the morning succeeding Dallas's interview with Miss Dalrymple, when disclosures were made of a nature so important as to affect the whole current of both their lives, the sub-accountant, still in a state of mental perturbance was impatiently waiting until the junior clerks should have finished their duties of comparing with the ledger-keepers the previous day's transactions as detailed in the ledgers and cash books.

As soon as a lad was at liberty Dallas beckoned him to his office.

"Do you know the office of Morier and Co., somewhere in Little Margaret Street?"

"No, Sir, but I will find it."

"Go there and ask to see Mr. Morier and do not tell your business to anyone else. If you do not see him ask when he will be in? where he is now? who may be conducting the business of the firm? and then come back and tell me all you have learnt as to the firm. But should you manage to see Mr. Morier acquaint him that Mr. Dallas would like to confer with him without delay on very urgent business. Now run."

Dallas's pale calm face had a look as of marble.

In twenty minutes the junior returned. "Mr. Morier will be here directly, Sir."

Shortly afterwards, a somewhat foreign-looking gentleman was ushered into the office. He was rather short and rotund as to figure, with full face, pointed beard, small eyes, and spectacles. Such were the chief features of which Dallas took notice at the first glance.

"Will you sit down?"

"A lady importer," pursued Dallas, "with whom I have observed that you have transactions—"

"Yes, a Miss Dalrymple," interrupted Mr. Morier.

"Well, she sent us word yesterday that she was about leaving town."

"So I understand was her intention."

"On a visit to the country or one of the other colonies?" queried the sub-accountant.

"She did not inform me," drily responded the visitor.

"Then you are not connected in business?"

"We had transactions together," assented Mr. Morier.

"I understand," quoth Dallas, and reflected for a few moments. "It may, however, be well to mention the circumstance. . . . Yesterday morning a bill of Miss Dalrymple's was presented for payment, but, of course, could not be entertained in consequence of her communication. Evidently it had been entirely overlooked. If, therefore, there should still happen to be an open account between you, and you should have any further sum to remit to her, I thought it possible you might be desirous of protecting her credit."

"Pardon me," responded Mr. Morier, "but does it not seem a somewhat unusual course for a Bank thus to disclose the position of a customer to an outside indvidual?"

"Most unusual," said Dallas, "but you will quite understand I am guided by the fact of your having had large transactions with each other, but,

of course, you will treat this matter confidentially, and we will mention it no further."

"Certainly, it shall be just as you wish."

"I fear, however," continued Dallas, "that any such precaution will be needless, for doubtless you will know all the particulars in a few days, as soon as the discounting Bank shall have sent out notices of dishonour, and institute steps for the recovery of the amount."

The two men regarded each other.

Dallas knew this promissory note had been given by Miss Dalrymple to Mr. Morier, who, consequently, must have altered the name of drawer from "Morier and Co." to "Morris and Conway," and therefore that the notice of dishonour which the Austral Bank would have sent out yesterday must even now be in Mr. Morier's possession.

"Perhaps, you wish me to infer," said Mr. Morier, "that I may be one of the endorsers to the bill?"

"Not at all," replied Dallas, and waited for him to speak.

"I consider, however, the protecting of Miss Dalrymple's credit should be chiefly the concern of her banker. Has she not proved a valuable customer?"

"Quite so, but you may remember I asked you if she was leaving the State, or only about to visit the country. In the uncertainty of her movements the Bank could find no warrant for paying this bill."

"But was it not possible to have ascertained directly from Miss Dalrymple what her intended movements might be?"

"I am now applying to you for information."

"I regret I cannot enlighten you."

"It is most unfortunate," Dallas chimed in, and again paused to allow Mr. Morier to offer some further suggestion. Had he not had some interest in the fate of this bill, and in Miss Dalrymple's departure, he would at once have said so, and left the office. The fact of his deliberately remaining,

and sitting back in his chair, while his mind was busily taking in the situation, made it clear to Dallas that eventually his visitor would agree to all that he might require to insist upon.

"Still," continued Mr. Morier, "it is very serious to dishonour any customer's paper, when it is known that the party is so financially sound, for, of course, you are aware that Miss Dalrymple possesses ample means."

"From the admirable manner in which this lady has maintained her account with us, we could not assume otherwise."

"Then, of course, a mere bagatelle of this kind will be paid, and as she will, doubtless, in a day or two, communicate with us, I shall make a point of advising you of her address, so that you can inform her of the error,—an error she will immediately acknowledge by remitting you the necessary sum."

"For how much did Miss Dalrymple inform you the bill was made out?"

"Pardon me, she did not speak of any bill."

"But you, just now, alluded to it as a mere bagatelle."

Again their eyes rested upon each other's, and their expressions remained blank.

"It was but an assumption," said Mr. Morier, "but perhaps you would have no objection to my inquiring the amount of the bill?"

"None whatever. It is about one hundred and twenty pounds."

"Ah! as I imagined—a mere nothing to this lady—I can assure you the Bank will incur not the slightest risk in protecting this lady's good name, and funds are certain to be provided within this month, when doubtless she intended to forward the amount necessary to provide for this bill being duly honoured."

"But why in a month, if the bill be now payable?"

The eyes glittered through the spectacles.

"Had Miss Dalrymple been aware the bill was now payable, she would certainly have arranged for her account being in funds; therefore it may be assumed she has entered the bill in her books as maturing next month."

"It has been a very unfortunate error," agreed Dallas.

"But surely the Bank would not allow a trifling mistake of this nature to, perhaps, permanently ruin this lady's reputation in the business world?"

Mr. Morier half rose from the chair in the vehemence of his expression.

"It was precisely for the purpose of preventing such a calamity that I ventured to ask of you the favour of this visit."

"But how can I manage to obtain the necessary funds from Miss Dalrymple in time to take up this bill? . . You surely do not expect me to provide this large sum?" he added suddenly, fiercely screwing himself sideways on his chair.

"A mere bagatelle," coolly suggested Dallas. A quick movement of the head placed the spectacles directly towards the sub-accountant. Mr. Morier glared upon him.

"It is an unheard-of proceeding on the part of a Bank. The Manager cannot be aware of the true status and means of his constituent. I shall make it my duty to thoroughly acquaint him of this matter. It is not the first time subordinate officers have overstepped their authority."

Mr. Morier, having risen from his seat, was standing half-way to the door, his attitude betokening every appearance of righteous indignation.

Dallas made no remark. He was calmly admiring the form of his finger-nails.

"Sir," said Mr. Morier, scathingly, "will you be pleased to tell me if this be the actual whole extent of the assistance which this—this Bank of yours is able to render to a valuable customer?"

"Certainly not," replied Dallas genially, "I

can send word to the presenting Bank, and refer them to yourself for settlement."

"Dear no," he said with a start, "I have nothing to do with the affair."

"That is precisely the position in which we find ourselves."

"And rather than take some little trouble on a customer's behalf, you would sacrifice a lady?"

Dallas rather admired the lofty scorn with which Mr. Morier spoke, but he merely replied:

"I fear the case will not admit of further delay; the bill is here, now, awaiting an answer."

There was a faint hesitancy.

"It is most unreasonable, unbusinesslike, but rather than see the commercial standing of Miss Dalrymple thus imperilled, I will myself undertake to guarantee the repayment of the amount. She will be quite able, upon her return, to express her sense of your generous treatment. It will not redound to the credit of your Bank. Will you, therefore, oblige me with the necessary form of guarantee, which I will execute forthwith."

Mr. Morier re-seated himself at the table.

"It is not our custom to enter into guarantees without first an arrangement being agreed upon with the principal."

"What do you mean, Sir,—not take my guarantee?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir. I do not question your guarantee."

"Why, then, do you refuse to take it? If you need such a thing as a reference for such a paltry sum, you are quite at liberty to make every enquiry at my own Bank.—There, at all events, is understood the proper conduct of business."

"My words were, that it is first necessary to arrange with Miss Dalrymple, before any guarantee can be accepted on her behalf."

"What, then, is to be done?"

"The account can be placed in funds."

"What," he exclaimed excitedly, "do you mean me—me——" stabbing his breast with an outstretched thumb—"me to pay one hundred and twenty pounds into your Bank? Preposterous!"

"There is an alternative," suggested Dallas; "you might come to some arrangement with the presenting Bank."

"Ah! very likely. Would you mind telling me the name of the Bank."

"The Austral Bank."

"Ah! no, perhaps not. I fear they do not know me."

"But they can refer to your own Bank, and then the matter can be properly conducted," quoth Dallas somewhat slyly.

But for some reason or other the suggestion failed to suit Mr. Morier.

"I will make a compromise with you," he said, "I will pay half. One hundred and twenty pounds is altogether too large a sum to expect merely a friend to pay."

But the sub-accountant remained obdurate, and glanced towards the clock. He noticed beads of perspiration standing upon the forehead of Mr. Morier.

At length the latter gentleman said:

"Every feeling of honour and friendship towards an absent lady prompts me to protect her credit. Since your Bank has no regard for its customers' well-being, I myself will do that duty—you will take the consequences."

"As you please," blandly spoke Dallas, "but the funds will be needed before eleven o'clock."

Mr. Morier cast a look of evil upon him and furiously strode from the room.

The sub-accountant remained in deep reflection for some time before he began his work. The part in the drama allotted to himself was becoming plain.

Thirty minutes later, the ledger-keeper entered

his office and informed him that £120 in notes had been paid in to the credit of Miss Dalrymple, with the words on the pay-in slip—"To meet bill due 4th instant."

"Pay the bill," curtly directed the sub-accountant, and the ledger-keeper withdrew.

"I have judged aright," commented Dallas; "at all events she is safe for a month. . . the other Banks ought to be informed of this fellow's doings. Probably he has repeated the 'Morris and Conway operation' with each one, and it is certain to my mind, he will also leave Australia by the next steamer. It may, perhaps, be just as well to make a note of these vessels, and the dates of their arrivals at Ports."

He crossed over to the waiting-room, and looked down the shipping columns of the morning newspaper.

"He will have the choice between a P. and O. liner and the American boat. Ah! he has planned to escape to America. . . He will reach there in twenty-one days or so, more than a week before the frauds will be discovered."

"It is too bad to allow the scoundrel to escape, and yet—and yet—to cause his arrest would, of course, lead to the search for the maker of the bills. . . . A cable to Colombo would effect detention there." . . .

"No, he must go free. . ."

"O Grace, Grace, could you not see how this must inevitably end. . . and could have been prevented . . . had you but told me everything at the beginning . . . You love me . . . and yet can condemn us both to this death in life. . . No promise—no hope in the future . . . to leave me in absolute darkness as to what may be expected . . . perhaps, long months of suspense worse than death. . . Is it a small thing to take the life from me?"

Perfunctorily he went through the day's routine of work.

On his way home he turned aside.

"I may as well inquire if she has really departed."

Walking into the porter's office at the "Carlton," he asked if Miss Dalrymple had caught the train to Melbourne.

"Oh yes, because she had only a small portmanteau," as though he meant to intimate that not having to pack up her impedimenta accounted for her catching the train.

"But she could not have left behind her luggage?" exclaimed Dallas in astonishment.

"No, Sir, certainly not. Her luggage was all sent on board before the steamer left here, some days ago."

"Ah yes, I suppose so."

Thoughtfully Dallas continued on his way.

"Evidently she has made no attempt to hide her departure. Should any disclosure take place during the coming fortnight she will assuredly be detained at Colombo. She is travelling, too, without haste; two or three days she will spend at Melbourne or Adelaide, before the steamer leaves. . and she might have given those days to me, if she had wished it. . ."

CHAPTER XV.

"SPARED FOR HIS SAKE."

"The Past that grips the present as it stands,
And drags it downward with its ghastly hands."

—F. Kenna.

The American mail-boat left on the following Tuesday, and when Dallas failed to discover Mr. Morier's name in the passenger list, he thought it worth while to ascertain—if such could be done without attracting attention—under what assumed name he was now escaping.

He called Elliott, the lad whom he had previously despatched to the office of Morier and Co.

"I want you to go again to Little Margaret Street, and ask to see Mr. Morier—you know the gentleman—give him my compliments, and say, I should be glad to know the present address of Miss Dalrymple, if she should have written to his firm. But, in case Mr. Morier should be absent, there will be no need to ask anyone else in the office, for the Bank has no wish to cause its affairs to be discussed. You must, therefore, learn when Mr. Morier will be expected to return to his office."

"I understand, Sir."

In half an hour Elliott returned.

"Well?" questioned Dallas.

"Mr. Morier," answered the lad, "left for New Zealand on Saturday last."

"Ah, left for New Zealand,—did you ascertain to what port in New Zealand he has booked?"

"Yes, Sir, there was a youngish man sitting in

Mr. Morier's room; he wanted very badly to know all about my business, and where I had come from, but I simply said, 'I knew Mr. Morier, and wished to see him.' Then he told me he had taken Saturday's steamer leaving here for Wellington."

"For Wellington!" exclaimed Dallas, "on Saturday?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Did you hear on what business he has left, and when he is likely to return."

"The man said he had gone on business matters, and would remain, at least, a month in New Zealand, but that he could attend to any ordinary affair about which I might be concerned."

"But you replied, I suppose, that it would do when Mr. Morier should return?"

"That is exactly what I did say, Sir."

"You did perfectly right—now bring me the newspaper file with last week's papers."

Dallas turned to Saturday's issue, where it was advertised that the "Manapouri" would sail at 1 p.m.

In Monday's shipping columns were the lists of passengers in the boats which had "cleared." In the "Manapouri's" list appeared the name of "L. Morier."

"Strange," muttered Dallas, then, turning to Elliott, he said, "You may take these papers back to the waiting-room. That is all." Elliott left the room.

Presently Dallas nodded his head.—"I have it," he said. "He will have four days wherein to lose his identity in Wellington, and then travel to Auckland. At Auckland he will take passage to San Francisco by the 'Alameda,' which left Sydney only yesterday.—There is yet time for a cable.—— No, he goes free—for her sake. . ."

A fortnight later Dallas found himself looking daily for the cable news from Colombo, speaking of the calling there of the P. and O. steamer. In due

course, the intelligence was cabled to Australia, followed a few days later by a similar announcement from Suez.

Dallas began to feel easier in his mind, for he assumed Miss Dalrymple would tranship at Port Said, and, taking the steamer to Brindisi, proceed overland to London, and—then?

The arrival of each oversea mail filled him with expectancy, but no letter ever came. Sick at heart, the man worked on day after day.

Three weeks, four weeks, passed.

Had she absolutely severed all connections between them?

"No," said Dallas to himself, "she loves me, and her woman's heart will bring her to me. She has the understanding to direct her actions for the best, and the nerve to carry out her determination. The future of us both must be left in her hands."

"But why not have written to me?" Ah, there was the rub.

The "fourth of the month" was once again drawing near, and Dallas had dreaded its coming, for he knew it would bring in the denouement of the drama.

The sub-accountant, as he grimly reflected upon the impending crash, knew but too well that all these Banks in Sydney would not quietly submit to the wholesale robbery. He shrewdly suspected that the loss, amounting to a certainty to some six thousand pounds, and possibly four or five times as much, had been carefully and scientifically distributed amongst the various Banks by means of piles of valueless bills. He pictured to himself the consternation of the different Managers when they should realize that they had been deliberately victimized.

"What will their expressions be when they ascertain that although we had the honour of keeping the account which wrought the damage, and ob-

tained all the profit, yet we did not participate in their losses?"

Dallas knew also full well that for many weeks to come his own position would be a most unenviable one, and one, perhaps, not untouched by suspicion; but it had to be faced, and for many days Dallas had been preparing himself for the ordeal.

The "fourth" arrived.

The sub-accountant attended early at his office, and "passed through" without delay his usual routine work.

At nine o'clock the "Inward Exchanges" came pouring in from the other Banks.

The distinguishing stamp-marks were busily checked upon the faces of the various documents, indicating from which Bank they had been received, and they were then distributed to the several ledger-keepers.

The sub-accountant was standing near the "A" ledger ready to decide upon the payment or otherwise of doubtful bills and cheques.

"There must be something wrong here, sir," said ledger-keeper "D," advancing towards him. "Miss Dalrymple's account has, as you are aware, become inoperative, and yet here are several bills."

Exactly as Dallas expected—yet a cold pang struck to his heart.

With a simulated air of unconcern, he began to examine them. They appeared to be made out in several different handwritings, in favour of different parties and firms—one bill from each Bank, and a few from city branches of these Banks, known to have large businesses.

"Make me out a list of the bills, with full particulars as to parties, dates, and endorsements, and give the name in each case of the discounting Bank."

Then he passed on to the other ledger-keepers, hurrying so as to quickly "clear" all the exchanges

and thus leave more ample time to discuss the position of affairs with the manager.

At length, having dealt with the exchanges, with the exception of those he was about to refer to the manager, he returned for Grace Dalrymple's bills.

"They are here, sir, and this is the list." The total amounted to £2957 3s. 6d.

"Nearly six thousand she said she signed," communed Dallas with himself; "there must therefore be a second batch falling due next month. . . . Large bills, too, ranging each one from one hundred to three hundred pounds. . . . 'Tis strange that no inquiry ever reached me from the other Banks at the time they discounted her bills."

He entered the manager's room, and one by one a decision was given as to the various other bills and cheques, which the sub-accountant was referring for treatment.

Having concluded, Dallas excused himself, and returning to the ledger-keepers, delivered to each one the documents pertaining to his particular ledger, mentioning, at the same time, how they were to be dealt with.

Then he re-entered the manager's room, and in a matter-of-fact manner laid down Grace Dalrymple's bills.

"I fear there has been a fraud perpetrated with this account," he coolly commenced.

The manager rose to his feet with electric haste, and grasped the bills.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed, his voice pitched high with excitement.

"Oh, the Bank is all right," explained Dallas.

"Are there no funds?" rang from the manager.

"No, sir, the account is practically closed."

"Closed! did you say? Closed"

The sub-accountant regarded him with some astonishment, as he pressed his bell with unrestrained peremptoriness.

A clerk hastily appeared.

"Call Mr. Lindsay!" he shouted.

Dallas turned towards him in still greater wonderment, and noticed great drops of perspiration standing on his forehead.

The accountant walked quickly into the room, his face expressive of a surprise due doubtless to the clerk's energetic delivery of the message.

Look at these bills, Lindsay; three thousand pounds' worth. Dallas says there are no funds—account closed. Have you any knowledge of the matter?"

"None whatever," replied the accountant, examining the bills; "but we are not affected; these appear to have been discounted by other Banks."

"Yes, yes, but there are our own 'discounts' on her account. Probably the makers are also frauds."

"Our discounts!" exclaimed Dallas, aghast. "Good heavens, I did not know she had bills under discount."

His coolness vanished. Rushing from the room, Dallas went straightway to the Bill Department.

"The 'Discount Ledger,'" he demanded, as he unceremoniously pushed his way to the desk. The clerks in the room looked up in astonishment as the usually deliberate sub-accountant passed excitedly through their midst.

Behind him streamed the manager and accountant, looking equally perturbed. As though alarm were conveyed by the very waves of the air throughout the Bank, there seemed to succeed a hushed movement of excited expectancy. Something was understood to be wrong, and official after official added numbers to the throng. In a few minutes the whispers seemed to grow; excitement pervaded every part of the Bank—a suspension of regular work—a restless coming and going—a movement—uncertainty.

In the meantime, the clerk had fetched the ledger from the safe, whence it had not yet been taken for the day's reference and work.

Dallas ran his eye down the index. "Here it is—folio one fifty-three."

His worst forebodings seem to be fulfilled as his glance met the familiar name. With the fierce desperation of a man forced to believe against his faith and convictions, he regarded the clerk as he turned over the leaves. Her words shot through his brain: "You will learn of what value your care has been!"

Folio 153—Grace Dalrymple.

There was no balance!

"No bills outstanding?" exclaimed both the manager and Dallas simultaneously. "What does this mean?"

"Some weeks ago," explained the clerk, "on this date"—placing his finger on the last entry—"Miss Dalrymple asked the amount of the discount balance against her, less deduction for rebate, and handed me a cheque on her account for the total. She took the bills with her."

The manager's face indicated the extent of his relief.

"And you hold no acceptances of hers?"

"None, sir."

"Dallas, in a state of sudden revulsion of feeling, returned slowly to his own room. He sat down leant his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his hands.

She had spared the Bank for his sake!

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THE FRAUD WAS CARRIED OUT.

"There never did, and never will, exist anything permanently noble and excellent in character which was a stranger to the exercise of resolute self-denial."

—Scott.

Shortly afterwards, the manager, holding nearly a score of bills in his hand, entered the office of the sub-accountant. He was followed by the accountant.

"Mr. Dallas," he began, "do you know anything about this extraordinary affair?"

Know anything!

Both his superiors stood and regarded him. Dallas arose, closed the doors, and then moved two chairs to the table. It seemed to him he should, as in duty bound, account for the part he had taken throughout, and yet how could he betray her. He well knew that a full disclosure would be quickly followed by decisive action in unison with the other Banks. His manager would show but little scruple in sharply dealing with both Morier and his fair accomplice. Moreover, Dallas had already estimated the risk he had accepted in allowing their escape. To confess to the fact would be self-admission of the worst form of incapacity—the lack of ability to act promptly in an emergency—or else something much worse—and inasmuch as there happened to be a handsome woman concerned in the affair, the latter suspicion would be only too certain to attach to him, destroying forever the confidence of the Bank in his integrity. How could the Bank

be expected to rightly determine the justice of a matter in which he himself could adduce no reliable evidence? He had simply a lover's blind faith in the innocence of the woman he loved. What weight would such a circumstance possess in the opinion of these two hard-headed business men? Dallas, at his age, falling in love, and shielding a criminal!

He had already reckoned up the cost of the contempt that would follow upon confession. For better or worse he had determined to make Grace's interests his interests.

With marked deliberation he returned to his own seat, the vertical lines imprinted on his forehead indicating the extent of his mental concentration.

"I can hardly explain," he began; "we have certainly had a remarkable experience, as it turns out, but it was impossible to foresee this result. When the account was first opened with a small sum of less than one hundred pounds, I confess to having felt doubtful. But the account was opened and managed in such a business-like manner that I could not help my attention being most favourably attracted, and concluded she possessed exceptional credit with London firms. In fact, it was the common-place account of a capable business party. In a very short time, however, the transactions, as, of course, you have also observed, reached large totals, too large, it seemed to me, to be accounted for by legitimate trading. A stranger cannot be supposed to come here and within the space of a comparatively few weeks form a large and valuable connection."

"Well," said the manager, "what did you deduce therefrom?"

"I knew she must have some co-operative assistance, and by closely examining her vouchers, found that the bulk of her transactions were with Morier and Co.—a firm of indenting agents. As,

therefore, I had already ascertained that no goods to speak of were consigned direct to our customer, I gathered she was continuing and extending the connection already established by English houses through Morier and Co."

"Quite likely," said the manager.

"You have seen Miss Dalrymple?" questioned the accountant.

"Several times, she called and spoke of business matters, but never committed herself by saying too much. I admit, however, I endeavoured to learn more about her business, but the attempt only drew upon me a distinct rebuff for my presumption." and Dallas shook his head ruefully at the recollection. "She evidenced, however," he continued, "such very great capacity, that one could not but feel complete confidence in her."

"She informed you, of course, of her particular line of business?"

"She led me to suppose it was something in the way of millinery and fashions, and apparently she dealt to a great extent with millinery houses."

"But did nothing transpire to show you there was downright fraud being concocted?"

"As the time passed, and much happened that puzzled me—for instance, the fact of no large local payments being made—not even to Morier and Co., but the amounts being cabled direct to London—I felt it to be desirable to be upon my guard, but watchfulness appeared to be quite unnecessary. Her account was maintained in such good order as to occasion no anxiety. And all the time, moreover, I could elicit not one tittle of positive evidence, and the account being a valuable one entailing apparently no risk to the Bank, I did not consider myself to be justified in giving vent to bare suspicions. I am astonished beyond measure that so many bills should have been discounted by the Banks without some enquiry from them reaching me."

"Well," said the manager, "I recollect some Bank or other sending to me for information, and upon referring to the ledger, the account appeared to be so well maintained, coupled with the substantial remittances she was cabling to London, that I am afraid I spoke too favourably."

"But did only one Bank make inquiry?"

"I remember but one instance, but either Addison or Scott could probably tell us something"

Dallas rang his bell.

"Ask Mr. Addison and Mr. Scott to step here."

In a few minutes the head of the Bill Department appeared.

"Do you happen to recollect," said the manager, "if any of the Banks made enquiry as to Miss Dalrymple?"

"Yes, sir," he replied, "several Banks asked for an opinion, and I gave them the substance of the reply you made to the Traders' Bank."

"You gave them!" exclaimed the manager with wrathful emphasis. "Was it such a difficult matter to report the incident to me? Do you know, sir, you are the direct cause of a huge fraud having been successfully perpetrated? Do you not yet understand that an individual's credit may be undoubted for a hundred or two, but quite dangerous for a thousand?"

With a gesture, he waved him out of the room. Silence fell upon the three men, as the manager lifted his hands, and then allowed them to fall to his sides expressive of despair.

"These wooden-heads!" presently muttered the accountant.

"And if," the manager resumed, turning towards Dallas, "you had known of such bills being discounted in this wholesale manner while funds were being cabled to London, you would have felt your suspicions fully confirmed, and have nipped this conspiracy in the bud?"

"Undoubtedly," responded Dallas, with eager

earnestness; "the knowledge of so important a fact would have supplied the link that was missing in my train of reasoning. God knows what awful results it would have saved.

"Ah! and all due to a clerk's stupidity—the value of a dozen years' services obliterated in a moment—Pish!—"

"But is this a conspiracy or an isolated case?" suggested the accountant.

"A conspiracy, undoubtedly," responded the manager. "This woman and a confederate have opened acounts in each Bank in various names, and have thus secured the discounting of their own paper over and over again. We have escaped, either because she perceived that Mr. Dallas felt some suspicion, or because it was deemed advisable to stand on good terms with one Bank through which they could send their remittances without exciting comment, and also obtain a good report—exactly as they have managed."

"It appears to have been a well-conceived scheme,' said the accountant, "but what can have become of all the remittances sent to London?"

"That is precisely the information for which the other Banks will be seeking. It is undoubtedly their money thus despatched, ostensibly to purchase goods."

"Then the principals will need to go to London to receive the proceeds of their spoil?"

"Exactly. Probably they fled some weeks ago, as soon as they had succeeded in discounting all the bills the various Banks were disposed to accept. Presumably they arranged for a discount limit of some two thousand or three thousand pounds with each Bank."

"And if," continued the accountant, following out his train of reasoning, "and if we reveal this knowledge to the other Banks forthwith, it may yet be possible for them to secure the parties by cabling

to London, and placing the affair in the hands of the London police."

Dallas was thunderstruck, and as the importance of the suggestion became plain to him, his cheek grew pale and his lips set. It had never occurred to him that Lintott and Co. were possibly not the well-known firm of that name, but merely an adoption of the name as a "blind," and they would, of course, have a different registered cable address. Lintott, therefore, was probably the principal who had devised and directed the whole system of fraud.

And Grace knew the code words of the Bank transmitting fifteen hundred pounds!

Dallas quailed in the agony wrought by the thought that suddenly confronted him.

The manager had also been impressed with the accountant's idea. He became thoughtful.

Presently he said: "We have no doubt as to the swindle, but we are hardly prepared to vouch for it as a fact."

"As, however," pursued the accountant, "we have been, although unwittingly, the cause of the losses to the other Banks, they will naturally look to us for all the assistance possible, to enable them to retrieve their loss."

Dallas regarded the accountant, but waited to see if he should propose any definite course to be followed. He was prepared to interpose only in the event of urgent need demanding action.

He had surrendered everything to Grace Dalrymple. His honour and reputation she held in her keeping; he could, therefore, but continue to trust and, if possible, defend her. The obtaining of a warrant against her, and the cabling to the London police, must be prevented at any cost.

"What do you think?" suddenly demanded the manager. Dallas repressed a start.

"I think," answered Dallas, after a long pause during which the other two silently waited until

he had weighed his opinion, "I think we ought to be first, before all, quite sure of our ground. We gave a recommendation to the other Banks on good grounds, and if they should refer thereto we might exhibit the account, and let them judge for themselves. The account has been worked in such a manner, that while regular trading cheques indicate their purpose with bold frankness, the other cheques, which we now know to have been used for passing the money out of sight, appear in different forms as though issued for similar purchase of goods from several quarters."

"When did you make this dscovery?" spoke the accountant somewhat sharply.

"This morning when I glanced at the ledger-account. In adding up the amount of the remittances to London. I noticed each cheque had been differently drawn, although all the cablegrams except three, if I recollect aright, were despatched to the same party."

The manager nodded. "Continue," was all he said.

"I believe, therefore," resumed Dallas, "it would be proper to defend our opinion as justifiable, as undoubtedly was the case at the time when it was given. This course, at all events, would keep us free from any complications which might follow, should the other Banks decide upon attempting to make arrests. In the next place, there is grave doubt as to Miss Dalrymple being culpable. In recalling the several conversations I had with her, the impression remains that she was innocent of any intention to defraud, and that she was unaware of what was happening until, perhaps, the last week or two of her stay here."

"Notwithstanding the curious discrepancies in the wording of the remittance cheques," interjected the accountant.

"We have no proof of it being intentional. I quoted the instance to show her account would be-

tray nothing on inspection. Then, at a later period if she discovered the plot, I take it that she felt herself to be too involved to attempt any defence, and, so, fled at once. Such is the conclusion evident to my mind."

"As she owes us nothing," quoth the manager, "there is no harm in giving her the benefit of the doubt. She is a handsome woman, Dallas, is she not?"

"Very," responded Dallas laconically, and then continued, "moreover, in not providing funds to meet her promissory notes, she cannot be claimed to have acted with fraud against the Banks. She is responsible to those to whom she gave the bills, and should those persons have discounted the bills under fictitious names and pretences, I take it, the recourse of the Banks will lie against them for fraud—not against Miss Dalrymple."

"For what consideration did she give the bills?" queried the accountant.

"Presumably," responded Dallas, shrugging his shoulders, "for purchase of goods."

"From fictitious firms?"

What reply could Dallas make? She had told him that all the bills had been given to Morier and Co. He could only surmise that Morier and Co. had by some means substituted other payees' names in place of their own.

"That is not a point for the Bank to substantiate," he replied.

"But it is clear evidence of participation in the fraud, and she should be included with the others," persisted the accountant.

"I am inclined to side with Mr. Dallas; the Bank has lost nothing, and we do not want to be 'mixed-up' in the affair. I think, therefore, for the present we can afford to leave matters alone, at all events until fresh developments call for further consideration."

Having issued his dictum with a mind much

more at ease—inasmuch as it appeared probable he would not be called upon to admit a shocking error of judgment, but would be rather the envy of the other managers in having come scathless through an ordeal which had proved the weakness of all the others—he rose from the chair, raised himself to his full height, and urbanely walked out of the room.

The accountant, whose pre-occupied expression of countenance denoted a different frame of mind, also departed to his own room.

After his superiors had left the office, Dallas made no attempt to disguise his uneasiness.

"I must prevent his being subpoenaed as a witness," ruminated the sub-accountant, as the remembrance of the accountant's aspect fixed itself in his mind.

CHAPTER XVII.

"WELL NIGH BREAKING UNDER THE STRAIN."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; but sufficient unto a life-time is often the evil of a single day."

Day by day Dallas awaited with anxiety the course of events. The sudden stoppage of operations upon nearly a score of accounts, all of which had outstanding bills under discount, naturally caused active inquiry to be made, and as the various Banks proceeded to compare notes with each other, they came to realize that the operations were wider and wider in extent.

The discovery spread dismay among the Managers.

A conservative English Bank addressed a strong letter to the Bank of Australia, commenting upon the opinion given with regard to the maker of the now famous promissory notes.

The irate Manager came with the letter to Dallas.

The sub-accountant, however, having induced him to leave the letter with him for reply, returned at his leisure an urbane answer.

But the matter ended not there. A representative of the Bank called the following day, and desired an interview with the writer. A moment or two of quiet scruntiny followed as the visitor entered the sub-accountant's room.

Dallas gathered his visitor had determined to thoroughly discuss the situation.

"Doubtless you have inferred," he began,

"that I have called about this matter of Miss Dalrymple's dishonoured bill."

"I am glad you have done so," replied Dallas, "it will enable us to come to a full understanding."

There followed another quiet survey.

"I might tell you that, before I came here, I visited the other Banks, and ascertained the extent of information each possessed, and I might also add"—he said grimly—"that each one gives your Bank a good share of the credit of leading them into this mess."

"It is very kind of you all," answered Dallas, "and as you have been good enough to take upon yourself so large an amount of trouble, I hope you will not be content to stay half-way, but carry the matter through to its proper conclusion, and revisit each Bank once more in turn, and demonstrate to them that this Bank gave them precisely the information they asked for, and that they, and they only, are responsible for the consequences."

"I do not follow you," said the visitor curtly.

Dallas rang his bell.

"Request the ledger-keeper to bring the 'D' ledger."

Ledger-keeper "D" appeared with the huge volume.

"Grace Dalrymple's account?"

The book was opened at the proper folio.

"Return in a few minutes," said Dallas.

"This is the account," proceeded the sub-accountant, inviting his visitor's attention thereto. "You applied for information somewhere about this date"—indicating a line page on the ledger—"and were informed that the individual maintained a satisfactory credit balance. Was the information misleading?"

"No," assented the information-seeker.

"That transactions were considerable?"

"Yes."

"That she appeared to have a valuable connection, and that it was extending?"

"Perfectly correct."

"That she had paid cash to the present date for all purchases?" Here Dallas pointed to the cheque-entries for large amounts, all apparently given for the purchase of goods.

The visitor examined each entry critically. It interested him.

"I should like to examine these cheques in detail, if you would not mind showing them to me."

"No, I fear that is even more than the Manager would agree to, anxious though he may be to quite clear himself in your eyes. But, however, the omission will not be serious, for should the matter come before the Court, you can, of course, serve me with a subpoena, with the usual instructions to produce all books, papers, and vouchers in connection with this account."

"Still, I should like to perfect my information before proceeding to take any legal steps."

"Naturally," replied Dallas. "Perhaps I can give you much of the information you may need, but before we speak further I should like you to confess that the Bank gave exactly the reply to the enquiries which your own Bank would have given had the situation been reversed."

There was a thoughtful pause.

"Yes," admitted the visitor, "there is no blame attachable to yourselves, but—— you ought to have known more about your customer."

"That is a point that does not come into the discussion," Dallas decisively declared.

"You will understand, however," he continued, "that we cannot undertake to explain to all the Banks as I am now doing with yourself, hence my having given utterance to the wish you would be good enough to disabuse the other Banks of their misconception of our action."

"I shall certainly do as you wish," he replied,

and then remained for a minute or two in thought. Presently he said, "This is a really remarkable case, and the inspection of that account shows our suspicions to be wide of the mark, so far as your Bank is concerned. I admit I do not understand how the fraud has been so successfully carried on. . . ."

"Do you know," he went on to say, "that upon being informed by the other Banks of the names and addresses of the endorsers of Miss Dalrymple's bills, it was found that they all centred in one spot—Little Margaret Street. Hastening there, I came to two adjoining business premises; on the ground-floor of one was Morier and Co.'s office, and of the other that of John Nettles and Co. Passing upstairs I visited in each house seven rooms—the doors of which were opened for me by the landlord, upon whom I called, finding no response to my knocks. Each door bore a plate inscribed with one of the names entered in my endorsers' list, and without doubt from the description of the parties given to me, the whole sixteen accounts in all the different Banks were carried on by one or the other of two men. They had taken all the rooms of both houses, so as to exclude strangers, and at the same time to have a regular address for correspondence and chance visitors."

"But how comes it that the Mercantile Brokers have not found out the identity of the men?"

"I fancy that if any called—for only Morier and Co. and Nettles and Co. seem to have advertised—that these men responded, and stated the firm inquired about was only a manufacturer's agent and fulfilled orders."

"You mean that either Morier or Nettles slipped into one of the rooms upstairs, to which an enquirer was happening to make his way, and responded as though he were the party sought for, telling the visitor he was only a manufacturer's

agent, and prepared to book orders on account? Is that so?"

"Something of that kind."

"And that the deception was similarly carried on with some fourteen or sixteen Bank Managers and staffs? It is incredible!"

"The account with us was operated upon in the name of Essington Carleton Dawes, who, however, exactly tallies with the description given by the Merchants' Bank of their customer Louis Morier."

"Did the maker of the bills have any other account?"

"The woman! I have no information on that score, but then, we do not know yet how much more will be revealed; every day ever since the beginning of the month has disclosed something afresh. I tell you, Sir, it has become something serious, and the Banks are sick with apprehension. The account you have showed me to-day is the most extraordinary part of the whole affair. It is apparently honest and straightforward."

"Perhaps, she is honest?"

"Ps-pshaw!"

"Did you find any evidence when you examined the offices of the conspirators?"

"No, none whatever; there were the usual office fittings, with abundance of ordinary trade correspondence of a genuine character, proving that the two men had cleverly combined the real with the imaginary."

"You found their letter-books?" exclaimed Dallas in astonishment.

"No—their letter-books were missing."

"Did you find any letters or orders signed by Grace Dalrymple?"

"Yes, very many, in the office of—let me think —Morier and Co., I believe."

"What was the nature of the contents?"

"Simply orders for goods, with comments, description, and so forth, and advising enclosures of

her cheques and sometimes bills in payment of her account, as though she were merely an ordinary buyer."

"Perhaps it was so."

"Umph! We will afford you proof on that score —in good time. . . It is very satisfactory to find your Bank to be working with us, since your evidence will be indispensable. I will see you later on, and consult with you. Many thanks for your candour and courtesy. Good morning."

"Good morning," responded Dallas, with all the friendliness of his nature.

"Scarcely half an hour had passed when Dunstan, the accountant of the Austral Bank, banged his way into Dallas's room.

"I say, Dallas, old man, why are all these Banks making enquiries about Dalrymple's bills? Fortunately we have none due this month, but next month there is one for £359. There was something wrong about the last, you may remember it was not paid until the next day. Is there anything amiss?"

"You have Morris and Conway's account?"

"Yes," said Dunstan.

"There are no such people."

"Oh yes, they have a largely operative account. Doing a good business——"

"Now?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Because the firm levanted a month ago."

"Levanted—No—the business is still going on."

"When did they last pay-in?"

"Well, I have not looked at the account, so cannot say. Oh! yes, I do. I remember—several cheques paid in by them were yesterday, or the day before, returned dishonoured."

"And you paid against those cheques before they were collected?"

"Possibly."

"Possibly!" said Dallas, "but you had better make sure, for all the cheques of Morris and Con-

way which you have paid will become a dead loss to your Bank."

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"I mean that the firm has levanted."

"Not at all. How can it be when they are still operating upon their account?"

"My dear fellow, they have probably left a series of 'cross-fire' cheques and deposits to keep the account operative until they get a fair start.. I suppose the deposits have been reaching you by letter?"

"No, their clerk always pays in."

"Exactly so, the cheques and deposits have been left with the clerk."

"But, good heavens, man, what do you know about this?"

"Dallas's heart grew sick as he saw pass over his friend's face the same wild look of fear and apprehension which he had already noticed on others.

"You have seen the name of Morier and Co?"

"Yes."

"And Nettles and Co.?"

"Yes."

"And E. C. Dawes?"

"E. Carleton Dawes? Yes."

"Well those people, and a dozen other firms as well, are all one firm of two men, and they have been discounting each other's bills with the different Banks."

"Good Lord, Dallas, are you in earnest?"

"Yes. the Merchants' Bank and the London and Colonial Bank, know of the whole matter; call upon them; I have just shown them D—Dalrymple's account—they are making inquiries. I cannot explain again to you, old fellow. You can ask them——ask them."

Dunstan gazed blankly into the troubled face of Dallas, and then slowly, without uttering a word, passed out of the door—a blithe-hearted man utterly changed in ten minutes of time.

Dallas was well nigh breaking down under the strain.

What had happened was simply this. One, or perhaps two, principals who remained in London, bought and sent to Sydney consignments of goods for sale by the two principals in this city. Drafts were drawn against these goods, negotiated in London, and duly accepted and paid in Sydney. Other drafts were also sent without documents attached, but similarly accepted, paid, and the money remitted to London, for as such were not negotiated by the London Banks, but sent to Australia for collection, the inference would be that consignors forwarded invoices and bills of lading direct to consignees, or perhaps papers in closed envelopes, were attached to drafts, to be delivered up on acceptance.

Thus the transactions appeared to be genuine trade dealings, bespeaking a good connection with English houses. On arrival, these goods became sold to well-known houses for cash, which enabled the Bank accounts to present the appearance of legitimate trading—although probably sold at cost in order to effect a quick sale. The fraud was carried out by these two principals adopting other names, and each name or firm, as it were, having a separate office (all in the same buildings), and a separate Bank account.

Instead of the London drafts being, therefore, all drawn upon Morier, or upon Nettles, some were addressed to their respective other names under which they traded. These fictitious firms and consignees in turn gave cheques and bills to each other—sandwiched-in between regular transactions for goods. Thus, it came about that in course of time the two conspirators managed to get bills (drawn by themselves under other names) discounted at the different Banks, and the proceeds placed to their current accounts, so providing funds to meet the London drafts.

We have seen also how Morier himself passed on

to Miss Dalrymple for sale, goods consigned to him or purchased by him, and for these he took from her the bills in question—some £6,000—in settlement of outstanding balances of account.

The inference being that while Miss Dalrymple signed all her bills in favour of "Morier et Cie," the name was either left blank, or covered over with a strip of paper, afterwards removed,—and one of the firm's other names substituted, the probability all the time being, that Miss Dalrymple had no knowledge of any other firms or names in connection with the principals save those of "Morier et Cie" and "John Nettles and Co."

These bills being thus made out in favour of sixteen different firms, were correspondingly endorsed and handed in for discount to the respective Banks, where either Morier or Nettles kept their other accounts under fictitious names.

We have seen already how good reports were obtained from Miss Dalrymple's bankers, and it can be assumed that as the two conspirators opened satisfactory working accounts in each Bank—punctually met all trade engagements, and showed increasing transactions, that similar good reports would be given by each Bank in turn, on the strength of which two or three bills in each name, including Miss Dalrymple's, would become discounted against each of the sixteen accounts.

The difficulty presenting itself to each of these conspirators would be for each one to preserve eight different personalities with eight different Banks, all at the same time, but evidently by ensuring the secrecy of their clerk, who probably did most of their banking work, and by withdrawing themselves as much as possible from contact with the public, leaving to Miss Dalrymple the responsibility of placing the shipments at low cost, their identity had never become known. It is also conceivable that as expensive goods—one line after another—were sold by Miss Dalrymple for cash, that instead of paying the

amounts direct to "Morier et Cie,' in the ordinary manner by cheque, she should at their request cable direct to Lintott and Co., London.

As, however, many of her sales would need to be on three or four months' terms, herself would take from her customers promissory notes, which she would either discount with her own Bank, or endorse over to "Morier et Cie."

As, therefore, the cash she would take would not represent the full value of the goods from Morier and Co., it would be perfectly regular on her part to give this firm bills or promissory notes for the balances owing on settlement—bills that would eventually be met by the liquidation of the bills she herself received from customers.

. . . . . .

Such appeared to Dallas to have been the plan of operations carried out by these two men, the discoveries of the official from the London and Colonial Bank having made it clear how the fraud had been extended. Until then, Dallas had believed that only Miss Dalrymple's bills were concerned, but now he saw that the proceeds from the discounting of the conspirators' own promissory notes had been used to meet the drafts drawn against consignments from London, while proceeds from sale of the goods in question were remitted through Miss Dalrymple's account direct to the confederate in London.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEAVING THE SCENE OF THE TRAGEDY.

"In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night."

Dallas's nerves were now subjected to a state of high tension.

He lived in a constant fear of what an hour might bring forth.

The following morning, as he returned to his office, after the customary consultation with the ledger-keepers, he perceived another official from the Traders' Bank awaiting him. Almost wearily he sank into his chair.

"Yes?" he asked interrogatively; he knew the clerk's business.

"We have a bill drawn by Grace Dalrymple upon you; it was not honoured on presentation, and I have called to ascertain if you can kindly give me some information——"

"Yes," said Dallas, "every information—the whole matter has been entrusted into the hands of the London and Colonial Bank and the Merchants' Bank. They will be glad to know of your claim."

"Oh! thank you—then, I shall call upon them?"

"If you please," responded Dallas, and his visitor vanished.

A few minutes later, another gentleman entered the office. An eye-glass appeared to be his distinctive characteristic. He seated himself with careful deliberation.

'Haw! I ought to introduce myself to you. I am Mr. Lloyd-Colquhoun, of the British Bank. Our

accountant suggested to me I might call on you, and to request—er—some—er—information as to one Grace Dalrymple, whose bill——"

"I understand," said Dallas shortly, "will you kindly return to your accountant, with my compliments, and inform him that the Bank has already anticipated his request, and has supplied full information to the London and Colonial Bank."

"Er—quite so, but our Bank would like to know——"

"Precisely what has been intimated to the London and Colonial Bank."

"Er—thank you. Good morning."

"Good morning," replied Dallas.

Mr. Lloyd-Colquhoun had hardly departed ere another inquirer appeared.

"Good morning, Mr. Dallas, can you tell me something——"

A gesture stopped him, for the sub-accountant knew what was coming, and all these references to Grace struck home like so many poignard stabs.

"Will you sit down for a moment, Mr. Heyward?"

Then he explained in a few words the steps that were being taken, and referred him also to the London and Colonial Bank.

But the matter was not thus ended. Among the Managers of the other Banks intense feeling had been aroused, and frequent interviews resulted. The persistency of the inquiries, and the discussion of all the several incidents, made it quite evident that there had been formed a concerted movement, with the determination of bringing to justice at any cost the perpetrators of the fraud.

Still no word from Miss Dalrymple. If he could but warn her of the impending danger!

It was a terrible thing to him to hear her name bandied about as a synonym for infamous dealing, herself regarded as a clever, unprincipled adven-

turess, and all the time to be powerless to defend her reputation, and prove her innocence.

Thus the month flew on, the strain upon his nerves growing daily fiercer in almost a sustained agony of dread and suspense.

Yet no action during all these weeks seemed to have been initiated.

Had the Banks really perceived him to have been sheltering Miss Dalrymple?

The fourth of the following month arrived, and as upon the previous occasion, Dallas had attended early at the Bank. It still wanted some minutes to nine o'clock, and the earlier clerks were noisily procuring their books for the day's work.

Dallas, seated in his office in a state of uneasy distress, awaited the development of the final act of the system of fraud.

A quarter past nine o'clock.

The Manager, too perturbed to wait until Dallas should visit him, now entered the office.

"Has anything further been reported?"

"We shall hear directly; the exchanges from the other Banks are hardly distributed."

He called a passing clerk.

"Tell ledger-keeper 'D' to bring me all Grace Dalrymple's bills."

"Yes, Sir," said the clerk, as he closed the door behind him.

The Manager and sub-accountant remained standing in the room. They were waiting in silence.

Presently the inner door was quickly opened. They knew that the bolt had fallen. The ledger-keeper held an array of bills in his hands. A glance showed them to be Grace's.

"Enter full particulars on a sheet of paper."

The Manager sank into a seat with a despairing gesture.

A sickness of heart seized upon Dallas. He had

to bear in silence the opprobrium he felt to be showered upon the woman he loved.

Nearly ten minutes they waited without either attempting to utter a word.

Then the ledger-keeper reappeared, and placed the bills with the long list before the sub-accountant.

"Three thousand two hundred pounds!" he read aloud, setting the pile before the Manager.

"Sh! Sh!" ejaculated the latter through closed teeth. Rising from his chair, he thrust his fingers straight into his waistcoat pockets, and kicked his feet.

"These make six thousand pounds—obtained on one name alone.—How much has been defrauded altogether?"

"As well as I can gather," summed up Dallas, with forced calmness, "there must be a loss of some thirty thousand pounds."

"Thirty thousand pounds! Good God, man, what do you mean?"

The Manager, aghast, seemed to have lost his balance.

"We have cabled to London about half that sum," resumed the sub-accountant in a hard voice.

"No wonder, then, no wonder the Banks charge the blame upon us."

He rose again from his chair, and paced before the table.

"Something must be done," he muttered, "must be done, Dallas," he said, with sharp decision, "we can't stand this."

The reply was some little time in coming.

"I fear that to attempt any remedy will be for us to admit the justness of the blame. Moreover, the other Banks have more reason for action than we could claim, and are quite capable of taking, unaided, the necessary steps to bring the fugitives to bay."

The accountant suddenly entered. He had as-

certained the state of affairs from the ledger-keeper.

"We should have taken decisive steps a month ago," he jerked out,—his face flushing with rage.

There was hurried movement heard in the office, as the clerks gathered in their eager inquiring after this fresh instance of successful swindling.

The messenger appeared at the door.

"The Chairman of the Board, and the Manager of the London and Colonial Bank, wish to see the Manager."

With slow step the Manager departed towards his own room.

The accountant picked up the bills from the table, betook himself from the room, and banged the door.

Dallas was helpless.

The day passed amid extreme excitement, telling yet the more upon the nerves, because suppressed. The night came, but with it—no sleep.

For many a night afterwards, oppressed with a sense of impotence, unable to grasp or control the fateful march of events, Dallas became a stranger to rest.

There came upon him also the ever-gnawing anxiety as to Grace.

The man at length, no longer able to bear up, approached the Manager, seeking leave of absence. He felt he might, later on, need all his strength.

"Certainly," said the Manager, in reply to his request, "the need is self-evident, but I must see, first of all, who there may be to take your post. Will to-morrow be soon enough for you to be relieved?"

"I should like to sail by this afternoon's steamer to Tasmania," replied Dallas.

"Then I shall arrange by some means or other to relieve you of duty."

Thanking the Manager, Dallas returned to his office, directing the messenger, as he passed, to refer all customers either to the Manager or the Accoun-

tant. Then, locking himself in, he proceeded to examine all papers dealing with uncompleted matters, and to add the necessary memoranda to his information book and diary, such as would serve to guide his successor.

Finally, for the Manager's knowledge, he wrote out a synopsis of Miss Dalrymple's transactions and dealings with the Bank, such as might be publicly known, tracing the line of policy he had observed towards the other Banks, and explaining the position he had taken up.

He treated the matter purely from the standpoint of a Bank dealing with its customer, making no allusion to his insight into Miss Dalrymple's business connections, with which he had become privately acquainted. Dallas's point was to simply allow the books, and the Bank records, to speak for themselves.

Shortly before lunch he entered the Manager's room, and handed him this document, together with his diary and information-book.

"I do not think," he said, "that I need say much in explanation, for I have noted down every matter that has come before me, and should anything further occur in reference to Miss Dalrymple's case, in which I may be of service, I shall be glad if you will cable to my address. It is entered in the diary under this date—Hadley's Hotel, Hobart—and if I should change my quarters, I will send advice.

"Yes," responded the Manager, "I confess I wish to leave Miss Dalrymple's affair entirely to yourself. You have acted well throughout in what has proved a very delicate business, although—well, never mind—go and make the best of your furlough. and I hope to see you quite yourself again. . . . Will you come and lunch with me at the Club?"

"No—I thank you, for at present I have made no preparations for departure, and there are a few matters to be attended to."

"Well, good-bye. I wish you a pleasant voyage," and, with a cordial shake of the hand, he took up his hat, and passed out of the room.

Dallas returned to his own office for his private papers, which he had set apart, and then taking his leave of the accountant, he also left the Bank, glancing backward with a sense of inexpressible relief.

To his mind the Bank appeared to be the scene of a tragedy.

Yet an unfulfilled tragedy in which the inevitable ending still hid itself in the unforseen of the future.

CHAPTER XIX.

OFF DUTY.

"Why therefore comes no answer to my prayer?
It may be silence is the voice of God."

—P. J. Bailey.

On a quiet still afternoon in the early spring, Dallas, having completed his arrangements, drove in a hansom cab to the steamer's wharf.

A few minutes sufficed to transfer his luggage to his cabin, and then he strolled on deck in order to interest himself in the busy scene which always attends a steamer's departure. Cargo was passing on board up till the very last moment, yet, as four o'clock approached, all was in readiness for hauling ashore the gangways. As Dallas leaned upon the railing of the bridge, leisurely smoking, he became a disinterested spectator of the numerous leave-takings.

Presently the bell rang out its warning. "All ashore."

"Haul in the gangway."

The passengers stood grouped upon the decks, looking down upon the friends gathered on the wharf, and sending their last messages and good-byes.

"Cast off for'ard."

The hawser splashed into the water as it was hauled aboard, the engine-room telegraph rang above the din of escaping steam and the shouting; the screw gave a few turns astern, in order to swing out the vessel's head from the pier, then "slow ahead," while the stern hawsers were flung off the

piles, and the "Tambo" started upon her voyage, curving with a slow grand sweep out into the harbour, clear of the shipping.

There was something majestic in the easy movement of the handsome steamer, as she thus swept out into the fairway, and passed down the harbour through the masses of shipping stretched along the shores, and past the long succession of coves and bays, where vessels of all descriptions were lying at anchor.

The white puff at the head of the bay told of the shunting railway engines, already delivering the early "arrivals" of the wool clip. Beyond, crowning the hill in the distance, appeared the stately University; on the left, Dallas's gaze rested upon the classic pile of the Anglican Cathedral, in studied contrast with the adjacent Town Hall, so magnificent in its proportions, its massive hall, its unrivalled organ.

Along the ridge the eye continued its glance until it met the solitary Observatory, with its ivy-covered walls and tower, keeping guard over the stretching city and the winding waters.

All around were closely massed the warehouses, structures, and dwellings of a growing busy city, throbbing with the life of half-a-million souls.

A very grand scene it appeared to Dallas as he made a quiet survey from the steamer's bridge, and seemingly presenting a new aspect, when rounding Miller's Point, he looked upon North Sydney resting, as it were, in the full light of the afternoon sun.

Round swept the steamer, sounding her whistle as a warning to small craft, although it was still too early in the season for the usual cloud of white-sailed yachts, which in the afternoon lend happy animation to the harbour.

Past the Circular Quay where Sydney was born, and now the centre of its trade, with the Custom House, and the wool-stores, while behind appeared

the impressive facades of the noble piles of Government buildings.

Then, Farm Cove, with its group of ironclads and cruisers, and behind, Government House in the midst of its Park. Spreading beyond, the Botanic Gardens and the Domain found their gladdening break into the dense masses of the city, which, as Woolloomooloo appeared in sight, seemed to have become yet more dense. And thus onward to the ocean, ridge and valley, cove and promontory, on either hand carried the view over villas and mansions, gardens and primitive forest scrub, until the eastern shore, with its garden-studded harbour-slopes, but precipitate ocean-face, shuts out the long swell of the Pacific Ocean.

Threading past the ships and islands, the "Tambo," giving Bradley's Head a wide course, passed down the lower harbour, past the Light-ship, and through the sentinel "Heads," and out to sea.

As the evening closed in, the land disappeared from view, and still night settled down upon the grave, quiet ocean.

There was a brilliant scene at night as dinner was served in the well-lighted saloon. The eager vivacity of holiday-makers, most of whom were making the round trip by way of Tasmania to Melbourne, lent a gladsomeness to the assemblage that proved a grateful change to Dallas's spirit.

Delightfully refreshing, too, was to return to the promenade deck, when, revelling in the beauty of the night upon the sea, Dallas paced up and down the long deck. There was a swish and sough pleasant to the ear, as the steamer drove her way through the yielding waters, and the dark glint that flashed up from the depths appealed to the fascinated senses.

Then, drowsiness begotten of the fresh sea air pressed upon his eyelids. He retired to his cabin, and for the first time for many weeks he slept soundly.

Like a new man he arose in the morning, sought out the bathroom, and half an hour later was watching the sea-gulls flitting from crest to crest on the ocean waves.

The men he met on board were come from all parts of the Colonies—aye, the world—and each seemed filled with the vigour which is both the cause and effect of successful work. Dallas had passed into a different atmosphere, and the sense of dread uncertainty became a far-removed feeling.

Only a man direct from hard intense work can appreciate the charm of indolence, the delight of lounging about a steamer's deck, of idly listening and idly watching. Two days and three nights Dallas thus spent, and early on the third morning, he came on deck to behold the loveliness of Tasmania, as the "Tambo" approached the entrance of the Estuary, and continued her way up the wide sheet of water, with the snow-capped hills on either side, until sweeping round, she nestled into the bay which indents the City of Hobart.

The bright sunshine caused the city to appear even more beautiful than usual, although the trees as yet showed none of that rich foliage which later on enrobes all the hillsides, and strives to half embower the very city.

Dallas felt almost reluctant to break off the friendships which even in the last two days he had formed with many on board, for nearly all remained with the steamer. It was still too cold for visitors from Australia to make their sojourn in Tasmania, and even those who landed appeared to be solely on business bent.

Dallas stayed a few days at the hotel, but as soon as the novelty of the town had passed away, he longed to go into the country. From this step, however, he refrained, fearing at any moment to receive a cable from Sydney, which would necessitate his instant departure. But he had grown so weary of city life, and of city aspects, that, at length, he

took steamer, and passed up the river to New Norfolk, taking up his quarters in the quiet hostelry which overlooks the Derwent.

The slow, old-fashioned ways of the house, the budding cherry trees and currant bushes, the apple orchards on the flat, and the stretching hop-fields beyond the river drew to his mind the recollection of another country in the Old World.

What absorbing interest there seemed to be now in that Old World for him!

Day after day passed by. He walked, rode, drove, fished, almost exulting in the country-life. But no letter—no cable came.

Newspapers reached him, but disclosed nothing on the subject which so intimately concerned him.

The rest and change, however, restored to him his even mind, the daily exercise in bracing air gave him a feeling of health and vigour that brought back to him the remembrance of school days, while the curious stone bridges, and walls, together with hedges and farm houses enclosed within their courtyards and their walls, were of the very type of England itself. He seemed to have left Australia behind, with all its dread reminiscences of the last few months.

Thus three weeks were spent, and, as the end of his leave drew near, Dallas almost reluctantly packed up, in order to return to Hobart for the night, prior to taking the early train for Launceston.

The leisurely train, after traversing the charming outskirts of the city, crossed the river, and then entered upon its devious course northward, through the centre of the island, passing here and there the lovely bits of scenery, for which Tasmania has won so good a name for itself, and at other times revealing the rugged hills in all their bareness—country, however, whence Australia draws many of its choicest sheep.

Dallas with keen interest studied the land, and

speculated upon its possibilities, while, like every other Australian visitor, he marvelled at the State not having kept pace with its Australasian sisters. In the afternoon, the train approached Launceston, and Dallas became charmed with the picturesqueness of land and city.

After the manner of a man upon a holiday, he strolled around the town, and drove about the environs.

In the morning he embarked once more on a steamer, and for some two hours steamed down the Tamar River, as it cut its way by farm and meadow, and through the bush-clad hills to the distant sea.

The usual uneventful trip succeeded as the vessel headed north for Victoria. Through the afternoon and night she continued on her way, until, entering Hobson's Bay, she crossed that wide sheet of water, and some three hours later, as the sun was rising, she steered between the retaining walls of the Yarra River, and at length drew up at the wharf at Melbourne.

Driving to an hotel, Dallas first breakfasted, and having got rid of all evidences of his voyage, proceeded to call at the Melbourne Office of his Bank.

Having entered into conversation with the Manager, the subject soon reverted to the famous Dalrymple fraud.

Dallas inquired if any further circumstance threw light upon the matter.

"Not much has happened. Our Manager at Sydney had occasion to come to Melbourne this week, and related all the particulars. He gives you the credit, Dallas, of having protected the Bank."

"There would have been some credit deserved if I had managed to save the other Banks, but they charge the blame upon us."

"So I hear, but I think our contention is clear."

"Did you learn what steps had been taken towards tracing the defaulters?"

"Only that the Banks are now satisfied that the arch-conspirator is identified under the name of 'Morier and Co.' and that he was ably seconded by another rascal, both of whom safely reached San Francisco, and there disappeared."

"And our customer—Miss Dalrymple?" inquired Dallas.

"She has been traced to Italy. She left the P. and O. liner at Suez—took train to Alexandria, and thence crossed to Italy, where she became lost to view. But she was evidently seeking to elude pursuit, and by her action confirmed the impression that she was part of the gang—not a foil, as I believe was your suggestion?"

"She was a foil," quoth Dallas decisively.

"She is a very handsome woman, I hear?"

"Yes," again quoth Dallas laconically. This discredit cast upon Grace Dalrymple galled him.

"However," continued the Manager, "I understand the London and Colonial Bank, with the support of all the others who are interested, are actively investigating the affair. They have detectives upon the trail, and do not intend to desist until they have captured the criminals."

"Ah! I thought such would be their purpose."

"Yes, they lost no time—despatched men at once in pursuit, and cable after them such additional information as they may obtain from time to time, but it is observed they do not take ourselves into their confidence."

"It is just as well," replied Dallas, "at all events until we know how the scheme has been conceived and directed."

"Is there much more to learn?"

"I think so," answered Dallas.

"Then, doubtless, if this be also the opinion of the defrauded Banks, they naturally distrust us, believing our immunity from loss to be the consideration for our silence."

"Certainly not," said Dallas, "for I took care to show them our books."

The Manager's eyebrows uplifted.

"Then, it is a remarkable case," he said.

"Yes," agreed Dallas, "it is remarkable."

The conversation turning to other topics, Dallas mentioned his purpose of returning to Sydney by the steamer next day.

"Will you lunch with me to-day, and we will further chat about this interesting case?"

Dallas having accepted the Manager's invitation, left the room, intending to spend a few hours in the customary "sight-seeing."

Returning to the Bank shortly before one o'clock, Dallas was unexpectedly greeted by the Manager:

"It seems our relieving Manager had arranged to go to Benalla, to take charge while Elster, our Manager there, sought leave for the purpose of taking to himself a wife, and now——"

"Have second thoughts proved better?" queried Dallas, filling in the pause.

"No," resumed the Manager, reading from a telegram which he had taken out from his papers, "but our accountant at Maryborough wires that Atchison has met with an accident, and therefore the relieving Manager must go to Maryborough instead of to Benalla."

"And allow Elster's marriage to await a more convenient season?"

"I fear so, for you see, the busy season is now upon us, and we cannot spare anyone. I cannot understand why these youngsters do not choose the off-season for this sort of thing—since, after all, there is nothing in it."

"That depends upon the lady—at least, so I should consider," put in Dallas, thinking, perhaps, of Grace.

"Well, yes, ah yes, perhaps so.———But then they all seem much alike; at every Branch I visit,

the Manager's wife has the same grievance, details the same want, and gets the same answer."

Dallas laughed quietly, for the Manager's words touched upon one of the minor phases of banking, which hitherto had not claimed his attention.

"Still," resumed the Manager, "one does not like to disappoint a young lady, and somehow, an affair of this sort seems to mean a great deal to her sex, and I have therefore mentioned the matter to you, in case you may feel disposed to take Elster's place—in the office, I mean."

"I shall be glad to do so, provided the Sydney office gives consent, for I suppose they can do without me for another week."

"A week! Well, but Elster wants four weeks."

Dallas reflected. He did not care to imprison himself in Benalla, when at any moment, Grace might need his assistance elsewhere.

But he said—"I will leave you to arrange the matter with Sydney, but Elster ought to understand that if any development of the 'fraud case' should occur, he must return at once, so that I may proceed forthwith to Sydney."

"Quite so," agreed the Manager, "I will wire to Sydney," and taking a telegram form he wrote out the message.

"Copy this," he said to the clerk who answered his bell, "and despatch it at once."——"Now," he said to Dallas, "we will go to lunch."

Shortly after two o'clock they returned, and found already a reply from Sydney permitting the request of the Melbourne Manager to retain Dallas for four weeks.

"If you will make it convenient to call at four o'clock," said the Manager to Dallas, "I will have your letter of instructions ready. The train leaves at half-past five."

"I shall be here," replied Dallas promptly.

CHAPTER XX.

EXCITEMENT AGAIN.

"If we can still love those who have made us suffer, we love them all the more."

Welcome—"Se non sei Cellini sei Benvenuto."

—Italian saying.

The same evening Dallas arrived at Benalla—a town situated on the main line of railway connecting Sydney with Melbourne. The following morning, having checked over the cash and securities, and made out a statement of all the balances, he assumed charge and released Mr. Elster, who thereupon took train to Melbourne, en route to Ballarat, where his fiancee resided.

The month passed uneventfully for Dallas. No news had come to hand throwing any fresh light upon the frauds; no letter had come from Grace Dalrymple. Dallas might have felt almost reconciled to the persistent silence had he not heard the disturbing intelligence that detectives had been employed to follow the fugitives until their arrest should have been effected. He knew, therefore, it would be only a question of time, and that as soon as a capture should be made, the information would be cabled out.

In the present state of affairs residence in Sydney would prove irksome, and, moreover, he feared that being subject to an incessant sense of disquiet, he would be liable to break down under both the hard work and the anxiety. It decided him, therefore, to ask for a post somewhere in the country districts of New South Wales.

His request drew forth a very appreciative letter from the Manager at Sydney, who, while regretting that Dallas should have found himself unequal to resuming his old post, nevertheless would consult his wishes as soon as a vacancy in a country branch should occur.

Very fortunately for him this event happened within a few days, and a telegram sent through the Melbourne office instructed Dallas to proceed to Quandong, in New South Wales, as soon as Mr. Elster could return to Benalla.

As this circumstance only deprived the newly-married Manager of one day's leave—the month having all but expired—he responded to Dallas's telegram without demur, and thus enabled the latter to take the next train for the north.

The following day, Dallas reached his destination (which was a pleasant town situated on the railway line and distant less than eight hours from Sydney by train), and went into permanent quarters as the Manager of the Quandong Branch.

During the months that followed, more than one incident of an exciting nature claimed the exercise of the new Manager's energy and resource.

It seemed fated that his life should not be uneventful.

But these matters must here be passed over, for have they not been elsewhere spoken of?

The last days of spring were at hand. Bountiful Nature had fulfilled her annual mission, and all the country shone gloriously with the grass and crops of growing wealth.

What mattered the loss and depreciation attending upon a few acres of city property down by the sea, when the whole expanse of a mighty country, unconscious of havoc elsewhere, was forming, growing, and producing with the slow, deliberate ease of Nature, the real staples of wealth destined to revivify the scared cities?

All around was the busy movement of prosperous toil.

The cities, with their high-strung nervous life passing through crisis after crisis, yet appeared to the broad view of the country, but depots whence supplies could be drawn, and which in turn undertook to market the country-grown produce. The country lived its own imperturbable life unaffected by what was passing in the world.

Here, only as the seasons came, did human life march in unison with them.

The gathering-in of the harvest sown by oneself upon one's own land,—the rearing and the care of stock,—the effort of daily life in the contest with Nature,—the energy, self reliance and resource which win the slow but sure success—these, it is, which beget the strong minds, and create the human heart in every man.

The four Banks which controlled the fortunes of Quandong and the surrounding district, seemed absurdly insignificant with the paltry staff of two, three, or four clerks, a few trays of coin, and some bundles of notes, wherewith to provide the swarming country-side with the sinews of toil.

And yet their advances and deposits amounted to hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Only the three—and four—thousand-pounds-edifices lent distinction to the business of banking.

But the four officials of the Bank of Australia worked with little reck of the eight-hours' adage, and the transactions that daily passed through the office would have gladdened the spirits of many an Old-World banker. Items that embraced the value of entire clips of wool—and changed, at one stroke, bank accounts previously thousands of pounds in debt into being thousands of pounds in credit—were negotiated week by week.

And other Branches dealt with grain crops, with cattle-rearings and sales, with the produce of scores of dairies, of orchards, of sugar plantations,

the output of gold mines, the accessories of the coal-fields, the smelting and export of silver, copper, tin.——

The Banks fostered and developed each and every industry of advancing Australasia.

Hence are thy riches, Australia. Seek not subsistence for thy sons and daughters in the rank factory life of other countries, while yet shall remain to thee the untilled soil.

"Is it always as busy as to-day?" asked Dallas one Monday evening soon after he took charge.

"No, 'tis getting worse," laconically chimed in the pert tongue of the junior clerk.

And as the spring progressed, and shearing became general throughout the district, and the shearers' and rouseabouts' cheques passing into circulation, enabled storekeepers to double their takings and multiply their deposits, Dallas began to entertain the same opinion.

And now in the height of the wool season, when all day long the loaded wool waggons came into town from every direction, all trending towards the railway station, it can be understood how the busy air of prosperity pervaded the transactions of the town. Dallas might have been found in the office at an early hour, while late into the night the lights shone through the interstices of the Venetian blinds.

It was a time when a Bank official is called upon to stick to his post, and considerations as to self are left for future entertainment.

The Post Office clock struck nine.

Dallas had partaken of an early breakfast, and had now been working steadily for nearly two hours.

Surrendering himself to a few minutes' respite, he drew his chair to the open window and sought from his pipe to derive some diversion of thought. As he composedly blew forth the gentle cloud, he found himself wondering whether the work and re-

sponsibility attending upon the charge of a branch in the country were really less onerous than the pressure experienced in the city.

He watched the junior clerk coming across the road, as he approached from the Post Office with the morning's mail crammed into his hands.

He banged the side-gate, passed up the walk, and entered the Bank by the private door. Dallas listened mechanically to his footsteps, as he burst through door after door with all the abandon of lusty young life, and finally tumultuously entered the Manager's room.

"Good morning, Mr. Dallas."

He deposited the pile of letters on the table and went out.

The other two officials had arrived, and there followed the heavy swinging open of the strong-room door, and the reckless thud of books as they were brought out in "armfuls" and "whacked" down on the desks.

Then followed the rapid turning-over of the folios of the ledgers as the accountant checked over the work of the previous day, and the voices monotonously called out names and amounts, with utter lack of interest in the significance of the entries.

Then came the rapid thud—thud—as the junior clerk jammed the "paid-stamp" upon the vouchers, destroying their future negotiability.

The routine of office work was in full swing, through which every clerk must steadily forge his way until, by the slow process of selection, the favoured "tenth" be singled out for the controlling post of manager, when "brain" and "direction" replace the mechanical work of the clerk.

Dallas having reseated himself at the table, took up the bone paper-knife, and commenced to open the correspondence.

Placing the ordinary "remittance letters" in a pile by themselves, to be dealt with in the outer office in ordinary course, he retained the special let-

ters that needed to be answered by himself. He had thus nearly finished his perusal, when, taking up the next of the few remaining letters, his heart suddenly seemed to stop beating, as his eye fell upon the superscription.

It was in the handwriting of Grace Dalrymple. A second glance showed the letter to have been posted in Sydney.

Instead of opening the envelope, he left his chair, and returned to the seat near the window.

The man was unnerved. His hands trembled as he passed them over his face and head. He gazed out in stricken agony.

"My God! Arrested!"

His hands fell helplessly beside his chair; his head drooped.

With an effort he aroused himself, sat upright, and with stern will strove to control his feelings. Presently he rose up, and returned, slowly and painfully to the table, his white set face every few moments appearing to quiver.

In the silence of the past few months, his passion had struck deep roots into his strong nature. Every fibre of his being had become bound up in this woman.

He stood still, looking down upon the envelope. The long-expected had come at last, but not as he had looked for.

He sank into his chair, and with a hand which still slightly trembled, he opened the envelope.

"Dear Keith," the letter ran, "I am here at the 'Carlton' once more. Can you manage to come? There is much to tell you which I cannot commit to paper. Yours faithfully and truly—Grace."

Bewildered, Dallas laid down the letter. "Can he come!"

He arose, as though he would set out straightway. The next moment, however, consciousness of duty returned to him.

But he could not stay in the office; he must get

himself out, in the open air,—and let his overstrained nerves find relaxation in bodily motion. His brain would whirl itself off its balance, were he to attempt to sit still.

Thrusting the letter into his breast-pocket, and taking up his hat, he walked out briskly, turned round the next corner, crossed the "Reserve," passed along the quiet streets on the outskirts of the town, and began to ascend the long incline which led over the saddle of Quandong Hill.

Yet all the time while he recklessly plunged along, he absolutely thought of nothing. He dimly realized only that Grace Dalrymple was back again in Sydney.

Having reached the top of the ascent, he suddenly wheeled around and stood looking over the town, which lay spread out on the level country, with its thin straight railway track,—like a ruled line—bisecting the map.

Mechanically his eyes followed the line across the plain as it passed amid gardens, paddocks, and farms into the distant view, still continuing on—on —to Sydney. Some short puffs of white smoke appeared near the station.

It was but an engine shunting some goods' trucks, but a lively sense of expectation and desire awoke within him. His glance swept over the town, every building he knew, and conspicuous above all was the handsome structure of the Bank of Australia.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed, "I have not unlocked the teller's safe."

He looked at his watch—ten minutes to ten o'clock.

He bounded down the hill, restored to himself, in that his mind once more had a practical definite object in view. He soon traversed the mile and a half, arriving at the Bank about a quarter past ten o'clock.

Already were several people waiting in the of-

fice, whom the accountant was endeavouring to keep in good humour until the Manager should return.

"I am very sorry to have kept you waiting, but I went out forgetting I had not unlocked the safe."

For nearly two hours, customers occupied Dallas's attention, to the exclusion of all other thoughts, and routine work kept him still busy till lunch time.

Then, accompanied by the ledger-keeper, he entered the dining-room of "Quandong Hotel," to be followed by the accountant and junior upon his returning to the Bank a half hour later on.

While the ledger-keeper remained in the Bank, in order to attend to any casual customer who might come in, Dallas retired to his private sitting-room, and, lighting his pipe, calmly proceeded to re-peruse the letter from Grace.

"Everything must be right," he soliloquised, or the wording would hardly be so matter-of-course."

"Humph! how can I get away? It would be useless telegraphing for leave; it might be a week or two before some one should arrive to take my place."

A week or two!

Esconced in his big chair, he smoked silently, as though contemplating the reality of the contingency of waiting a week or two.

"If I take the night train, I cannot return until to-morrow night. . ."

"Away for the whole day. . . . Something bound to go wrong."

A further smoke in silence seemed to convince him there was no alternative.

Re-entering the Manager's room, he took a telegram form, and addressed it to Miss Dalrymple.

It was terse, it said—

"To-morrow, nine o'clock"

Then, crossing the road, he handed it in at the counter of the telegraph office.

Before the accountant left in the afternoon, Dallas called to him, and upon his entering the room, informed him he should be absent on the morrow, and handed him a list of instructions with regard to certain accounts and other matters.

"You can direct either of the others to occupy my bedroom to-night and to-morrow night."

The accountant had his own room on the premises.

"I think that is taking every precaution," Dallas said to himself, and later on, entrusted his keys to the safe-keeping of one of the other Banks.

Throughout the afternoon he worked, and after tea, returning to his room, continued on, hour after hour, until the time of the arrival of the train drew near.

Taking a travelling bag with a change of linen and so forth, he walked to the station.

The train was punctual, and Dallas, having secured a sleeping-berth, turned in at once for a night's rest.

With the customary uneventfulness of a railway journey, the train sped on its way, until Dallas complacently noted in the early morning that they were passing through the populous and pleasant suburbs of Homebush and Strathfield and Burwood, prior to reaching Sydney. Realizing that in another quarter of an hour the train would reach Redfern Railway Station, Dallas passed along to the lavatory for his morning's ablutions, then, having repacked his travelling-bag, he awaited arrival in Sydney.

The platform was all astir with people on the look out for friends, but Dallas was not sorry to pass through their midst without recognising a single face. Proceeding to the Grand Hotel he refreshed himself with a bath and change of linen before sitting down to breakfast.

Possessing himself of a quiet corner, he became absorbed in the morning paper. A great content

had filled him since he knew he was coming to Sydney to see Grace Dalrymple.

But his calmness forsook him, on finding himself once more traversing the familiar city in the direction of the well-known Carlton Hotel.

Could he but know the import of this meeting! One's future is not a trifle that can be lightly dealt with.

Until yesterday he had settled down to grave patient work, prepared to see the years come in and go out, until the Arbiter of Fate made plain the future course of events.

But in one instant of time, the hour-glass,—as it were—had been turned.

Whither now, was she being led?

With almost a flutter of glad expectancy, he ascended the staircase of the Carlton Hotel, and, passing across the carpeted corridor, he opened the drawing-room door.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT 27 RUE DE LA REINE.

"The strongest passion that I have is honour;
I would I had none; it is in my way."
—P. J. Bailey.

Alone in the room was Grace Dalrymple.

She arose as Dallas entered.

Involuntarily he paused, endeavouring to conceal an emotion which he was no longer capable of repressing.

Not a word of greeting had passed their lips, but as Dallas drew near, he could not but perceive the glad light of love and welcome that shone in her eyes, while a bright flush of pleasure lent a still greater beauty to her countenance.

Suddenly the thought smote him. . . Would he now have to choose between his love and his profession? Must he abandon his career—all that had made life honourable, in order to give way to his love,—his passion, and surrender the endeavour of his work, and his man's ambition?

Erect and handsome appeared her tall form as she stood in the light that streamed through the window.

She held out her hand to him.

"Keith!"

The warm, firm clasp sent the bounding current surging through all his being in an ecstasy of delicious feeling.

He loved this woman, her magnetic presence, and the glory of her beauty.

"Come," she said, "I have a story to tell you, and we will be disturbed if we remain in this room."

Dallas followed as she led the way to a private sitting-room.

"You have aged," she said, regarding him, "but never mind; let me have your judgment on the last chapter of a crime and then——!"

Dallas took the chair she indicated. The light from the window played upon her face as she sat still for a few moments, dallying with a diamond-hoop-ring that flashed upon her finger.

Motionless, Dallas remained seated, beholding her.

Presently she began,

"Doubtless you were more than surprised at not hearing from me. It was well. The less you might have to speak of—perhaps, the better." She pushed back her chair at an angle, so as to bring the light behind her, and place her face in the shade.

Then she resumed,

"It is a long story, and I do not wish to traverse again all that you have gathered and inferred; you will learn as I proceed how far your conclusions may have been just, therefore, I will relate the subsequent events in few words. The strain of telling will make it necessary to be short."

She again paused, as though deciding upon the method of her story.

"Leaving Australia, I travelled direct to Europe, and disembarking at Port Said, and transhipping for Italy, proceeded thence overland to London with the mail-express. Having received the advices awaiting me, I returned to Paris, and saw—well, we will still call him Lintott—but that is not his name. He had received the whole of the money—rather more than twenty-six thousand pounds."

Dallas moved uneasily in his seat—the words, although seriously and earnestly uttered, galled him; they touched upon a tenderness. His companion perceived the effect, but made no comment.

"Lintott satisfied me it was all safely lodged in four Banks—all agencies of London firms. As a matter of precaution, I insisted upon the sum in one of the Banks being transferred into our joint names. For a special reason, I allowed the other moneys to remain in the Banks in his own name, pending the arrival of the other two men by way of America."

Dallas's face clouded, and again he moved restlessly, while his hands clenched, but he made no interruption.

"Knowing they could not arrive for some six or seven weeks, I spent the interval amongst some friends in Austria."

"Afterwards returning to Paris, I ascertained from a letter left for me that Morier had cabled from America fixing date of meeting on 25th of the following month, at 27 Rue de la Reine, in the city of Lyons."

"Another six weeks of waiting!"

"For certain reasons I did not wish to trench upon my private resources, as possible eventualities might require the command of a given sum of money. Communicating, therefore, with a firm at Grenoble with whom I have had connections, I succeeded in resuming business to an extent sufficient to provide myself with occupation, and, more important still, to enable my movements and transactions to escape police espionage. In due course, therefore, I contrived that my journeyings should bring me to Lyons on the 24th of that month."

"During the evening I discovered the presence of Lintott, and we had a short conversation. Morier, he informed me, would arrive the following morning. He had landed from America a few days previously and had remained during the interval at Bordeaux."

"Lintott then notified me that a meeting would be held at 8 o'clock the following evening at 27 Rue de la Reine. For a special reason, however, I caused

the hour to be altered to two o'clock in the afternoon."

Evidently the narration was painful to Miss Dalrymple, for she paused and betrayed considerable agitation. Dallas, in his anxiety to hear the whole truth, and know the worst, could scarcely control his impatience. It was to him a state of equally painful suspense, but he put no question, and in a few moments Miss Dalrymple continued—

"During the following morning I completed such business as I had reserved for myself in Lyons, and about mid-day I breakfasted—as we call it—at the Restaurant de Laval, in the Rue de la Reine, nearly opposite No. 27. The restaurant is on the first floor, with oriel windows looking out upon the street. There were but few people present as I entered the Salon, for it was then late, so that I was enabled to choose a seat near a window commanding a full view of all that was passing."

"I remained at the window, after finishing lunch, until I saw Lintott appear, shortly before two o'clock. Discharging my bill, I descended to the street, and entered No. 27 directly behind Lintott. We ascended the stairs together, a fatiguing operation—for the room was on the sixth floor—the topmost storey, and constituted Morier's permanent residence. His business centred in Lyons, the visit to Australia having merely formed an interlude, and doubtless he was now returning to resume his former occupation. You will, of course, gather that the name of Morier, like that of Lintott and the others, was assumed for the occasion. . . .No, Grace Dalrymple is my true name," she added, perceiving the question framing itself in Dallas's mind. The words conveyed a nameless relief to his heart, and seemed to betoken honesty on her part, at all events.

"But you knew their names to be assumed?" he questioned.

"We will come to that part of the story in due course," she answered.

"Ah!"

"The tone irritated Grace Dalrymple, and with a slight haughtiness in her manner she added:

"Although 'Grace Dalrymple' is my true name, it is, I may tell you, not the designation under which I have been known in my business relations in France."

This admission proved too much for Dallas's self-control. The nervous tension of his mind had been growing more and more acute during the last half-hour, as Grace Dalrymple had proceeded to deliberately unfold her intimate connection with the doings of this band of swindlers, and now her confession smote upon his sense of honourableness. Smarting under the sudden shock, he sprang up and paced across the room in the impatient manner of one who would like to kick the thing away from him. His movements recalled to her mind that other scene when they had last been together, and her resentment passed away.

He suddenly stopped opposite to her, and was about to speak.

"No," he said, "go on, I am listening," and sat down again in his chair.

The pathetic ring of resignation in his voice affected Grace, and for a minute or two there was silence.

But, nerving herself, she resumed her narrative as though there had been no interruption.

"Entering the room, we found Morier alone. He greeted me with an eagerness which only the presence of Lintott prevented from being effusive."

"After a few words of general conversation, Lintott asked Morier if he had been enabled to advise Nettles (I give the name you know) of the change in the hour of meeting."

"I detected an almost imperceptible shrinking of the fellow as the question was put, for Lintott has a sharp, penetrating trick in his manner of speaking."

"'No,' answered Morier, 'I have not, because he cannot come. The poor fellow died from fever in America.'"

"'Why did you not let us know at the time?' interrogated Lintott."

"But Morier only shrugged his shoulders."

Miss Dalrymple paused awhile in her narration, perceiving the distressed expression of Dallas's face.

The woman he loved, to have been associated with these men!

But he did not speak, so she went on:

"Morier moved across the room and took up his travelling-bag. Searching in the pocket he drew forth an envelope, whence he took out some papers and laid them on the table for our perusal. They were certified copies of a medical certificate and of a registration of burial. There was also a newspaper, with an announcement of death. I examined the papers after Lintott had carelessly flung them down, but, of course, was unable to question their genuineness. Knowing, however, the character of Morier, and remembering his shrinking when the subject was first mentioned, I felt instantaneously that—Morier had killed him——"

Dallas violently started, and drops of sweat stood out upon his forehead. A quiver passed over his companion, as, leaning forward, she spoke with intensity, recalling a dreadful scene.

"'Where is his will?' I asked," Miss Dalrymple continued.

"Morier turned pale as he sharply regarded me. He knew a woman's instinct had divined his purpose in getting rid of a confederate."

"Lintott's attention was now alert, and his eyes were rivetted upon Morier's face."

"But the man was equal to the occasion, and underwent the scrutiny without discomposure."

"'It is true,' he said, 'that poor Nettles made a will. I attended him throughout his illness, until, feeling he could not recover, and that his end was

near, he expressed his wish to benefit myself as much as lay in his power, and so made a will in my favour, especially bequeathing to me his share in our little enterprise. You will observe from the date that he only lived about a week longer.' ''

''I perceived a gleam in Lintott's eye.''

'' 'He could hardly do less,' I hastened to assert, 'and it is only what one should fairly expect to happen.' ''

''Whatever Lintott may have thought, he however, withheld all remark.''

''Presently he said, 'Let us to business.' ''

''But Morier had glanced towards me with a look of thanks, mingled with something of more serious meaning.''

CHAPTER XXII.

TO THE DEATH.

"Raise no money by vile means."
Shakespeare.—"Julius Caesar."

Dallas rose from his chair, and advanced to the window, which he flung wide open; the atmosphere seemed to be stifling him.

Miss Dalrymple waited until he returned.

"As Lintott spoke, he placed a chair for me at the table. The other two, having also drawn close, Lintott produced a full statement of accounts. He had a record of everything. I checked off with my note book a list of remittances, and then took a note of all the expenses. The amounts cabled to London through myself constituted most of the—the—acquirements—in Australia, the stock purchased in Europe having been met by London drafts, drawn against the goods, and which were all met in Sydney, while many drafts had been drawn which were not represented by goods. It was apparently hoped that the losses to the Sydney Banks having been distributed so that not more than two or three thousand pounds would fall upon each Bank, that the sums would respectively be thought too small to warrant the Banks individually taking action for their recovery."

"As, therefore, Lintott went through the list with Morier, and then produced his bankers' receipts, showing more than twenty-six thousand pounds lying at their disposition, he gave vent to a grim satisfaction."

"'Very creditable for six months' operations,' he said."

"'I feel bound to admit,' added Morier, 'that the whole credit, so far as ultimate success is concerned, is largely due to Miss Dalrymple,' and they both thanked me."

Dallas twisetd himself around and stared at her incredulously.

But Miss Dalrymple, taking no heed of his regard, continued,—

"The accounts having been passed as correct, and all the necessary comments made, Lintott next proposed that now they should make a division."

"From his manner I guessed, at once, that he did not intend to admit Morier's claim to a 'fourth' under Nettles' will, in addition to his own fourth-share."

Dallas thrust out his legs, and hammered his heels upon the carpet with a gesture indicative of unutterable disgust.

But Miss Dalrymple went on, without noticing him—"Perceiving, therefore, the inevitable wrangling which would result, and the, perhaps, serious consequences of a dispute into which I should doubtless be drawn, I thought it best to speak straightway my own opinion."

"I said, 'I consider myself only entitled to one-fourth, say, six thousand five hundred pounds, and to three hundred pounds, the balance of the five hundred pounds which were assured to me before accepting this Australian engagement. Therefore, if you both agree, I will take this sum, and leave you to settle between yourselves whatever other details may remain undecided!'"

"Thereupon I looked steadily at each in turn, and knew that each one comprehended me."

"Six thousand pounds, you may understand, was the amount in the Paris Bank in the Rue de Provence, standing in the names of Lintott and myself."

"Without a word, Lintott made out an order for that sum, and signed it. Taking up the sand-box from the table he sprinkled a light shower over the wet ink, and handed to me the cheque with a bow, indicating with his finger that I should also sign beneath his name. Then he gave me another cheque for eight hundred pounds, signed by himself only. I observed this smaller cheque to be drawn on a Bank in Lyons."

"I perused the cheques with attention and care, seeking, moreover, for time to think, for, evidently, Lintott had caused the money to be transferred to Lyons in order that it might be more easily manipulated. He had not informed me of his action, and the bankers' receipts which he produced were those from Paris."

" 'It was a thoughtful act,' I remarked to him, 'to transfer the money from Paris, but I suppose you did not place the whole sum in one Bank.' "

" 'No,' he replied, 'I merely asked each of the Paris bankers to transfer the moneys to his agent at Lyons.' "

" 'And those agents are?' I queried."

" 'The particulars as to names and amounts are entered here,' he replied, handing me a slip of paper."

"Hereupon, Morier referred to the expenses of Nettles and himself through America, and produced a long array of figures, especially emphasising the costs of Nettles' illness. It was evident, at the outset, that such expenditure should be chargeable only against his individual share. Lintott, however, was prepared to concede liberally to Morier, a sure sign to my mind that he had some secret intention."

"It was not, of course, for me to interfere."

"Everything was, therefore, finally agreed to, and it remained only to make the distribution."

"Lintott made out the various cheques which would refund to each the expenses allowed for,

some of which he handed to Morier and the others he retained himself."

"'This is the balance which remains for division,' he said, as finishing up his figures on a sheet of paper he handed it across to Morier, saying that he would be pleased if he would check the calculations."

"There followed some five minutes of absolute stillness, as Morier deliberately checked over all the calculations."

"'It is quite satisfactory,' he then remarked, 'and Miss Dalrymple having accepted her share of the distribution, this remaining sum will only be divided into three.'"

"'Into two,' urbanely corrected Lintott; 'I have shared with yourself all the expenses to which you were subjected on account of the unfortunate illness of poor Nettles.'"

"These expenses were incurred in the common enterprise.'"

"'Quite so,' assented Lintott, 'and therefore Nettles did not possess any right of giving away that which could only be acquired by favour.'"

"But Morier considered that a man was at perfect liberty to consult his own wishes, and bequeath to whom he would his reversionary interests."

"'Granted,' said Lintott, 'but that is a question for the consideration of lawyers, not of men of enterprise like ourselves, where risks are incurred, and as in this case, in which the responsibilities of Nettles are passed on, equally, to ourselves. Moreover,' he added with a shrug, 'lawyers would not pass over a dead man's share until they had independently investigated into the cause of death, and so forth.'"

"I had been closely watching both men, and noticed at these words the deadly gleam which strove to hide itself under the drooping eyelids of the Frenchman."

"The moment had arrived for which I had been waiting."

"'Gentlemen,' I said, 'I perceive there is a question to be argued which is too difficult for me to comprehend, or to allow me to act the part of umpire. I should, also, be sorry to take the part of either, at present'—laying stress on the present.—'It seems to me to be a matter in which each has a just contention, and judgment consequently becomes a matter of opinion. In such circumstances, therefore, it may be left for the stronger will to assert itself. And now, if you will permit me, I shall retire, and afterwards you can let me know the result.' "

"Taking up my purse, into which I had folded unperceived the cheques and the slip of paper containing the list of the sums of money, and the names of the Banks, I rose up from the table."

"Glancing towards Lintott, who was seated before me, I divined the fixed expression of face to be sufficient indication of the result, without the accompanying look with which he favoured me."

"With his native politeness, Morier hastened to open the door for me."

"I caught a glance of his eye, as I passed out; immediately afterwards as the door closed, and was locked behind me, I halted in the passage in a state of trepidation."

"'He means to kill,' I said to myself."

Enthralled by the note of tragedy running through her story like an undercurrent, the disgust which Dallas had hitherto felt, gave way to intense interest. He leaned forward, following every word of the narrative, which was told with a simple directness, and yet so graphically put before him, that he seemed to feel himself one of the party. Perhaps, the feeling was partly due to his sympathy with Grace, and insensibly he was becoming a sharer of her view. He had now no word to say, but simply awaited for her to go on. She looked into his face,

and observing the eagerness of his attention, at once continued,—

"Without again pausing, I hastened down stairs, and onward through the crowded thoroughfares to the Banque de Lyon in the Rue de l'Imperatrice."

"It was getting late in the afternoon, and I had not much time before bank-closing time. Still, it occurred to me, that I may have been watched by someone, possibly conscience had made a coward of me. However, I halted at a shop window, and took occasion to narrowly examine everyone within view. There is a great stir of business in the main thoroughfares of Lyons; they resemble the George and King streets of your own city, and in a passing crowd, it is not easy to distinguish upon what business passers-by may be intent. Therefore, I hailed a passing cab—a fiacre—and drove to the Rue Vaubecour. Stopping before a milliner's establishment, I dismissed the vehicle, and satisfied myself that I was the subject of no one's attention. On some pretext or other, I entered the shop, and afterwards walking to the Cours Napoleon, just round the corner, took another cab direct to the Rue de l'Imperatrice. Passing up into the Banque de Lyon, I made my way to the 'guichet,' and presented my cheque for twenty thousand francs."

"Then followed the long formalities usual in a French Bank, but which appear so absurd to those accustomed to English systems of business."

"In the ordinary course, upon presenting myself at a second 'guichet,' I should have been paid in a nondescript collection of notes."

"But I wanted gold, and this request brought me into the presence of a very different sort of official to those who attend to the general banking requirements of the public."

"However, I obtained my gold, and although I should have liked to have secured it more quietly, still such was necessary, for at any moment I might leave Lyons for the frontier."

"Rouleaux after rouleaux were placed upon the table—twenty in all."

" 'But I cannot carry all this weight,' I explained."

" 'Pardon, Madame,' replied the official, without relaxing the parchment-like expression of face. In a few minutes an individual—half clerk, half porter,—brought in a leathern bag. The rouleaux were packed in this, and then we found the whole could be enclosed in my reticule. With his assistance, also, I had my reticule carried down into the street, and placed in a fiacre."

" 'Will Madame be pleased to indicate to what address one may direct the coachman?' "

" 'La gare de Perrache, if you please.' "

"Rattling along the stony street, I came once more to the Cours Napoleon, and the carriage drove up to the entrance of the station."

"Placing my reticule as gently as possible on the steps, I drew forth my purse and paid the cabman. Then, as he drove away, I essayed, as it were, to recall him, but not succeeding, I called another carriage."

" 'Drive me back to the hotel,' I said."

" 'To which hotel?' he asked."

" 'Hotel du Sud.' "

"Fortunately, my room was upon the first floor, but it was a difficult matter to carry upstairs my bag of gold, without drawing attention to the heavy weight I carried. Then, emptying out the rolls of gold, I took a moderate sum—some four or five thousand francs—an amount for such as I had often occasion to buy drafts—and leaving the hotel, proceeded to a banker in the Rue Imperiale, from whom I purchased a draft on London; then, returning to the hotel, I counted out another sum, and so, from different agents, I acquired some four or five drafts in place of the gold."

"Feeling I had accomplished all my purpose, I should have now desired to leave Lyons by the even-

ing train, but was held there by a kind of fascination."

"It had been more by instinct than by acting upon any settled plan, which had induced me to obtain gold for Lintott's cheque; possibly the intention of quitting France, immediately, led me to think gold would be the least traceable and the least hindering form of conveying the money out of the country, but, of course, reflection suggested its conversion into drafts, and having gold, such drafts could be bought without the source of the money being betrayed."

"An innate fear prompted me, throughout, to permit no visible evidence to remain of my connection with these two men. No one acquainted with the methods of French law, and of French police, cares to be subjected to the examination of the 'Juge d'Instruction,' who represents the one, or to the callous treatment which is characteristic of the other."

"As the afternoon passed, I grew uneasy. No one had called at the Hotel du Sud for me. Lintott, at all events, knew of my address."

"It was improbable, but that those two men had come to some arrangement before now——"

"Even had they quarrelled——"

"If Morier had carried out the threat of his eyes——"

"But one man does not kill another so easily when that other, moreover, is stronger and on his guard."

"But, despite my anxiety, I could not bring myself to even pass down the Rue de la Reine."

"Yet that street possessed for me a nameless fascination."

"The dinner hour arrived. I attended the table d'hote, and dined as well as I could. One did not know what developments the next few hours might have in preparation."

"All the evening I waited restlessly."

"Towards ten o'clock I could no longer endure

inaction. Sallying forth, I entered a carriage and directed the coachman to drive to the Place Louis Grand. We passed down the Rue de Bourbon, then continued beyond to the Rue de l'Imperatrice, back by the Rue Imperiale to the Rue de la Charite, and then yielding to an impulse I could not control, I ordered the coachman to turn into the Rue de la Reine. With quickened emotion, I perceived the carriage to be drawing near No. 27."

"The house, except for the hatter's shop below —which was still open—appeared all in darkness—silent and gloomy."

"The window of Morier's room looked upon the street—there was no light visible."

"With a mind strangely at ease, I drove back to the Hotel du Sud, glad to escape from the lighted streets, the noise, the clatter, the excitement of Lyons at night,—the very companionship which just previously I had sought."

"Having passed a disturbed night, I was early astir, partook of the usual light breakfast, and then waited aimlessly, for I knew not what."

"But I felt quite sure that something had happened—a dread fear—such as I would not permit my mind to let take shape."

"Ten o'clock had struck—I was in the sitting-room—almost alone."

"A waiter entered, and passing near, informed me excitedly of a tragedy which had happened."

"I divined instantly what terrible thing he had to tell me."

" 'Two men,' he said 'had been found dead in a room at No. 27 Rue de la Reine; the door had been locked. It appeared to have been a duel to the death.' "

"He told me what few details he knew. There had been a desperate fight, but the rooms on the same floor had not been occupied yesterday, and the room beneath had also been empty, consequently no one had been alarmed."

"'Both men were stabbed—stabbed each other to death. . . But the police had everything.'"

"As soon as the waiter left the room, I retreated to my chamber. Ever since yesterday my portmanteau had been ready packed for instant departure, and now I only waited for the hour of departure of the train for Geneva."

"I pray you will not ask me to recall the feelings which assailed me during a long hour of waiting."

"I dared not visit the railway station until the last minute necessary to secure my ticket."

"I felt that everyone knew of the crime, and that every departure would be specially 'vise' by the police."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE JUDGMENT.

"Divine Supremacy of Conscience."
—Dean Stanley.

Dallas's excitement seemed to grow more and more intense as Miss Dalrymple dramatically pictured her experiences in Lyons. He felt in full sympathy with her emotions, and participated in her consciousness of the peril of the situation.

He no longer judged her actions; he had become her colleague.

Truly she had told her story with marvellous effect. At length she resumed,—

"It was a delightful morning—a sunny, fair, warm-tinted day in autumn. The vines upon all the hillsides were taking on their russet and purple tints; the stretches of woods had assumed a mass of deep, rich colour, the bright streams flowing from the hill country sparkled and flashed in the sunlight, as we sped eastward towards the mountains; the fields were bare after harvest, and cattle browsed on the grass."

"The frontier was soon reached, and having entered Switzerland, there succeeded one of the most charming of railway journeys along the banks of the Rhone, between the lofty mountains of the Jura and of Savoy."

"But what would you?"

"Ever present with me was the terrible remembrance of yesterday. How could one tear from the mind the awful ending of those two men—the retributive consummation of criminal careers."

Dallas started as her deep, intense tones drove strange conviction into his heart.

"They, I believe, never intended to wrong me; but who knows how the result might have involved me in a manner such as would never have happened had they lived. Now, there were no longer even witnesses to testify, if need be, as to the part I had taken."

"And those men in whose confidence I had been, were dead—stabbed one another."

"Think you, that railway journey soothed a mind like mine? I would have fled from it all, but how slow the train seemed to travel."

"And all the way, thoughts, thoughts, my thoughts were upon me."

"At length, we steamed slowly into the station at Geneva—slowly, slowly, for a mile or more, as though a catastrophe were feared.—Aye, a catastrophe!"

"To me it was torture."

"Disembarking at the railway station, I passed along the platform, and directed the porter to leave my portmanteau at the consigne. Finding I had several hours to wait, I deposited also my wraps, and then, passing through the inevitable espionage at the exit, I continued through the city down to the lake shore.

"Following the lovely walk along the south-eastern bank which looks out upon the water—the delicate transparent blue of Geneva—now calm, majestic and serene in its stillness, I sought in the beauty of the scene—a beauty which penetrates through all one's being—I sought to forget everything but the present moment.

"Several hours I spent in Geneva—the vast silent tranquil mountains which looked down upon me, breathed something of their spirit into my heart. Possibly, it is owing to this charm that so many disturbed minds seek refuge upon its shores. With a lighter heart I returned to the city, and as the even-

ing was beginning to draw near, I betook myself to the Restaurant des Etrangers, where one may enjoy at once, exeellent cuisine, an admirable view commanding the swift waters of the Rhone as they issue from the Lake, and, in the distance beyond, Mont Blanc itself, and at certain hours delightful music from the band in the kiosk of the lakelet.

"I had often been to Geneva, and an hour or two thus spent formed one of the pleasures I always permitted myself. The change of scene, and the return of former reminiscences were tending to subdue the sharpness of recent events which still so persistently haunted the memory.

"At length the evening mail train bore me onward through the gathering shades of the long twilight, as we sped through the heart of Switzerland, past Berne, past Basle, thence into Germany, adown the course of the Rhine, intending to pass through Cologne to Rotterdam, where I should be able to catch the evening steamer to Harwich, and arrive in London on the following morning.

"I had fallen asleep, for the train had stopped at few stations, and I was very tired. Moreover, after passing through the 'Customs' at Basle, all the travellers in the carriage, anticipating uninterrupted repose, had settled themselves to sleep.

"In an hour or two, however, the train stopped at Strasbourg, and there ensued the usual commotion attendant upon arrival at an important city. Passengers were leaving the carriages, and others were taking their places.

"In a sudden flash it occurred to me that it was necessary to visit Paris in order to obtain cash for the cheque for six thousand pounds.

"The dreadful circumstances of the previous morning had rendered me anxious only to quit France, fearing something might be found among the papers of Lintott which might cause the authorities to desire to detain me, pending an investigation. I had become utterly forgetful of the importance of

reaching the Bank in Paris before news of Lintott's death should precede me.

"But further avoidance was out of the question. Starting up, I collected my luggage, and directed the porter to take my portmanteau to the train for Paris.

" 'At what hour does it start?'

" 'At two o'clock.'

"I found I should reach Paris at three o'clock in the afternoon.

"I awaited the train, my composure of mind—whatever I had succeeded in regaining—having now altogether left me.

"Throughout the long hours I counted restlessly the stations as the train flew past. After passing the frontier at Airecourt, the train stopped but seldom. Once, I remember, at Nancy, where a man who, after examining each carriage, at length entered my compartment; and again, at Chalons, when two Englishmen took places which had been vacated just opposite me.

"A sense of imminent danger had taken possession of me, and excitement prevented me feeling the effects of weariness. I strove to interest myself in all that passed—in the casual conversations of the others in the carriage—in the passing scenes viewed from the window—in desultory reading from a novel, which was powerless to hold my attention.

"Presently it became evident that one of the apparent Englishmen was an Australian. It can be understood my attention became absorbed, for matters he spoke about were only too familiar to me.

"Fortunately, he was a resident of Melbourne, or else, possibly, he might have recognised me. My luggage, however, conspicuously bore the address, 'Madame Dalmy'—the name under which I was known among business people, to whom I found the name of 'Dalrymple' to be difficult of utterance and of remembrance, and hence my object in making the

contraction—and 'Madame,' of course, since one does not find old maids in France.

"I knew by instinct that the subject of the frauds on the Banks would be referred to, and I steeled myself as I waited the inevitable. I strove to appear immersed in my book."

"In due time the allusion came. The Australian proceeded to recount the extraordinary deception practised upon the whole of the Sydney Banks.

" 'The managers,' he concluded, 'are mad with indignation at having been so deliberately befooled, and have determined to bring the parties to justice. In fact, I know the London and Colonial Bank have detectives seeking now throughout Europe for the woman, and mean to spare no effort to capture her. They hope, if successful, to recover also part of the spoil, so the prize is worth a little energy. But she was smart, was she not?'

"Those were his very words—they burned themselves into my brain, and I had to sit there—still—and listen to it all.

"I felt the toils were closing around me, and that in Paris would be the headquarters of such search.

"It needed all my nerve to continue that journey to the city. The death of Lintott and Morier would instantly draw attention—the police would, without doubt, learn I had been in Lyons—they would trace me to Geneva—through Switzerland and Germany. Ah! was it possible my sudden change at Strasbourg may have passed unnoticed, and, knowing my ticket to have been taken for Rotterdam, they may have continued the search thither?

"Even while my mind, thus at high tension strove to become coherent and collected in its thoughts and purposes of future action, the approaches to Paris, one by one, became evident. We had crossed and re-crossed the Marne, where, beyond the river, stretched the orchards of Lagny.

"The forts around Paris appeared—through the

woods and past the outlying villages we sped our way. The city itself came in sight. Nearer, nearer we drew—the walls were passed—then the mass of goods' sheds; under the Boulevard de la Chapelle, through the dense mass of houses into the Gare de l'Est.

"Issuing forth, my portmanteau was placed in a cab, and I was just about to give the direction to my rooms in the Rue de la Fayette, within a few minutes' drive of the Gare de l'Est, when it occurred to me that possibly my identity with Madame Dalmy may have been established. I drove, therefore, to the Hotel Richelieu, in the Rue de Mauveuge.

"Leaving my luggage in the bureau, I passed out of the hotel, and, taking the first cab which appeared, I hastened to the Banque de Commerce, in the Rue de Provence. Dismissing the cab, I entered the Bank with all the coolness and deliberation which I could command, and presented my cheque for payment.

" 'Notes in large amounts would be convenient.'

"Some delay occurred. Picture my anxiety. Possibly it was due to the cheque being large. Yet I had purposely signed my name in the cashier's presence beneath that of Lintott's, in order to disarm any suspicion or remove any hesitation.

"I refrained from asking for gold, fearing the formalities which might ensue. But the cheque was paid.

"As I was folding up the notes, I asked, as though the matter had just occurred to me, 'Might I have one note paid in gold?'

" 'Yes, but certainly,' and I handed him notes for ten thousand francs.

" 'English sovereigns?' I hazarded.

" 'Yes, if I would favour them by consenting to wait a few moments.'

"At length, with a heavier hand-bag, I descended to the street, and making my way along the Rue

Drouot to the Rue Vivienne, I succeeded in exchanging my roll of notes into Bank of England notes, drafts, and circular notes, all payable in London. Not wishing, however, to excite any attention, the exchanges were all made in small amounts, necessitating my visiting, perhaps, a score of money-changers' offices. This method was better than that of purchasing drafts on London, besides it having become too late in the afternoon. There were reasons, moreover, for avoiding the Banks, although, doubtless, I might easily have procured all I needed from certain unpretentious establishments which would be unknown to an Australian detective, inasmuch as Parisian Banks are not 'en evidence' like, for instance, your Bank of Australia.

"Finally, I drove again to the Hotel de Richelieu and dined. Then, in the evening, a cab deposited myself and baggage at the Gare du Nord. I caught the Brussels train, continued right through to Rotterdam, whence, crossing to England by the steamer to Harwich, I arrived safely in London."

"With your share of the plunder," quoth Dallas, contemptuously.

Miss Dalrymple flushed hotly, drew up her head, and was about to reply in similar tones. She checked herself, however, and pointing to the chair, calmly bade him re-seat himself.

For Dallas, unable longer to control his feelings, had started up impatiently. Absorbingly, he had listened to her narrative—following each word with a sympathy she felt, although it was unexpressed. But her cool recital of the manner in which she had obtained her money—the money of which his friends had been defrauded—had produced a sudden revulsion of feeling. It seemed to reveal to him the callous heart of an adventuress, and all his instincts recoiled from her.

It was now evident that she was exercising great self-restraint. His words had pierced to her heart.

She paused for some moments as though to collect herself, and then resumed her story.

"There were a few final preparations to make, final communications to be sent to the firm at Grenoble, and time-tables to consult. Afterwards, about four o'clock in the afternoon, I called to see the London manager of the London and Colonial Bank."

Again Dallas started from his chair. He could not comprehend this woman with her cool nerve, daring and sagacity.

She simply motioned him to sit down.

"He was a strong, keen-looking man, with an open face—a man one can trust. I said I wished to speak of a matter which would occupy half-an-hour, and desired there might be no interruption. I told him my information would be of service to the Bank, but that it would be given in confidence, and must be made use of without in any respect implicating myself.

"He hesitated, and regarded me steadily for some moments.

"Then, suddenly, he remarked, 'You are Miss Dalrymple from Australia?'

"'Yes,' I admitted.

"'Proceed,' he said, 'you may rely upon me absolutely.'

"I related to him the history of the fraud, and ended by handing him the slip of paper I had obtained from Lintott and which gave the names of the Banks where was placed the money—some twenty thousand pounds—but I had cut off the top entry from the list which referred to the sum of six thousand pounds, then in my possession."

"Ah! could you not also have made restitution of that money?" exclaimed Dallas somewhat bitterly.

"That concerned myself, the rest did not," curtly replied Miss Dalrymple.

Presently she continued—

"After I had recounted the deaths of Lintott and Morier, and explained that in a short while the police would doubtless trace the existence of the money, and, perhaps, render its recovery difficult, the manager at once comprehended the necessary steps to take to secure possession of the money. He stated that possibly he could succeed on his own initiative claiming on behalf of the Bank, as he held the evidence required to substantiate the claim.

"Then having further obtained from me all the information he considered would be needed, he assured me I might rest satisfied that I should not be connected with the affair, but at the same time he begged me to remain in communication with the Bank until the end might be secured.

"Within a fortnight he advised me that he had successfully submitted his proofs of ownership of those twenty thousand pounds, and in due course he would receive all the money on behalf of the defrauded Banks.

"He was good enough to express his thanks very warmly, and desired he might speak of the matter to the other Banks.

"This was precisely as I desired, and then I reminded him of one other matter. I had heard that at the instance of his Bank, a detective—"

" 'He has already returned to Australia,' he said, interrupting me quickly; 'his mission is ended.' "

"I learnt two days ago that a cable had arrived speaking of the recovery of the money."

Having said this, Miss Dalrymple leant back, and regarded Dallas.

His hands twitched, his expression was disturbed. Admiration, delight, pride, strove for expression, but held back for a nameless sentiment. He was not satisfied.

"The six thousand pounds!" eventually he ejaculated.

Miss Dalrymple had read every phrase of feel-

ing which had passed through his mind. She was simply waiting for his last thought to assert itself.

Smiling, she looked towards him, and replied,

"I reached here two days ago by the San Francisco route, and see—"

She held towards him a bundle of papers.

He took them.

"Your promissory notes!" he exclaimed.

He looked through the series, and paused thoughtfully.

"You have paid off each of the Banks?" he said.

"Yes, restored to them the amount of which they were defrauded through my acts, and out of my own funds I have made up their loss of interest to date."

Dallas laid the bills on a side table, and walked abruptly to the window.

Her eyes followed him with a wistful expression. She had grown to know and understand him so well.

"I had to right the wrong after my own methods," she explained; "and, Keith, you would never again have seen or heard of me had I not succeeded."

He moved impatiently, like as one who feels that himself is to be blamed—not the other.

He came back to her—sat down beside her—and placed his hand upon hers.

"Grace, my darling . . . will you try to forgive me?"

He spoke very simply, and quite humbly.

. . . . . .

EVERMORE.

"All things and thoughts, both new and old, are writ
Upon the unchanging human heart and soul."

—Lewis Morris.

THE END.

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